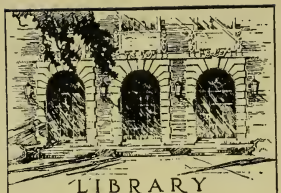

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# THE MASTER OF MARTON.

VOL. II.

# THE MASTER OF MARTON.

"To thine own self be true."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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# THE MASTER OF MARTON.

## CHAPTER I.

### PRISON BARS.

IT was three weeks after their marriage, and Janet and her husband were staying at Strathedie, a little village on the borders of the * * * shire moors. They had spent a few days in Edinburgh, but the town was empty now, and Mr. Clyde was impatient to be among the Highlands. He possessed, in a high degree, the true British passion for slaughter, and enjoyed a good day's shooting above almost every other pleasure. It cooled his hot blood, and afforded an outlet for that fiery force which chafed and

fretted beneath the high-bred composure of his manners.

Like many men of strong passions and strong will, he laid a powerful restraint on their outward manifestation. Still these volcanic natures, though they may not display a scathed and blackened surface to society, must in some way or other find vent for themselves. And perhaps Mr. Clyde would have been a worse man than he was, if year by year he had not got rid of a good deal of his superfluous energy through the muzzle of his gun.

As for Janet, her girlish dream of seeing the mountains, of climbing up their rugged sides, and gazing her fill over the limitless extent of forest, vale, and moor, of wading knee-deep through the purple heather, and seeing for herself the broomy braes and pine-clad hills which Marget, with true Highland enthusiasm, had so often described to her, had been realized to the full in her rides and rambles through the magnificent scenery they were traversing. Mr. Clyde spent great part of his time shooting over the moors. He was a far-seeing man, and reflected that his wife would be

a constant possession, always at hand to turn to when other resources failed; whereas it was but for a week at most that he would be able now to enjoy the glorious sport to which, each day, he seemed to bring an added zest.

Still there were many hours which he and his bride passed in each other's society, and these were spent chiefly in riding and driving through the deep mountain gorges and shaded glens, or over the purple moors and wide-spreading straths by which at every halting-place on their route they were surrounded. It was the readiest mode, Mr. Clyde thought, of passing away the time which often hung somewhat heavily upon his hands. The bloom had not worn from his beautiful prize, yet he could not help confessing to himself that, as a companion, Janet had proved insufferably dull. He was disappointed, for he had meant this Highland tour to have been pleasant to them both. Long ago he had discovered poor Janet's secret, and knew as well as if he had watched her building her frail castles in the air, that it had been the artist of the "Madeline" who had drawn away her girlish heart. Still he

had thought that when the gate of marriage was firmly closed behind her, and he had brought her amidst new scenes and away from all old associations, her mind would recover its tone, her face grow gay with smiles, and her eyes learn to dance and sparkle as he knew they could, with the humour lurking in their dark clear depths.

He had seen glimpses of this now and then when her own bright nature had flashed out unawares in some happy moment at home, and now he felt chagrined and almost irritated to find that, instead of her presence being one long gleam of sunshine, the tedium of a *tête-à-tête* was a thing which even her grace and beauty sometimes were hardly able to relieve.

Janet, too, felt oppressed by this mutual constraint, and, in her spiritless way, made an effort sometimes to remove it. But there was no spring left in her now. Her words seemed to fall dead from her lips. Try as she would, no sparkling bits of gaiety came laughing out in her talk. Yet she tried hard to keep up appearances, for though she chafed beneath the quiet despotism of her husband, she would not for worlds he

should know how keen was the feeling of remorse which in secret was eating into her life. She had sinned in those false vows which she had taken upon herself, but in the depths of this self-humiliation she was feeling bitterly how they crushed her beneath their weight.

And, in truth, the yoke which day by day Brian Clyde laid upon his wife was one not easy to be borne. With a woman's subtle instinct, Janet had perceived the place she held with him. He lavished upon her caresses from which she would fain have shrunk, but countless trivial slights betrayed that she was but reckoned among his chattels, more valued perhaps than the rest of his possessions, but still an appendage, nothing more. She knew that he expected her to be happy and gay, to be pleasant herself, and to make life pleasant to him; and with what power she had, poor Janet strove to satisfy her lord. Not that she cared to win him to herself, but she dreaded above all things that tacit displeasure which he was sure to evince when she had seemed more than usually dull.

They had driven one morning over the hills to

a village some miles away, whose white church spire Janet had often noticed gleaming among the dark pine woods by which it was surrounded. It looked so peaceful and serene there in the distant landscape that she longed to obtain a nearer view, and Mr. Clyde, who cared little which road they went, had taken it in his way.

It was a fair, quiet spot; nestled in the very bosom of the hills, with thatched cottages and decent stone tenements clustering around the manse and church, which crowned the summit of a steep ascent. Janet would have liked to have got out of the carriage and wandered for awhile around the old churchyard, but Mr. Clyde seemed indisposed to linger, and she would not risk the humiliation of a refusal by preferring a request which he might not choose to grant.

She looked at it regretfully, until a turn in the road hid the spire from her eyes, and then leaning back in the carriage, gazed out stonily before her, while her husband touched his horse to a canter, and through winding country roads they arrived again at the little inn where they were staying.

She was left alone in the afternoon. Mr. Clyde

had gone out shooting, telling her that he should be home at six to dinner. He looked half-sternly, half-mockingly into her face as he shouldered his gun, and bade her be ready to receive him when he returned.

"And look your best, Janet," he said, "and try to be in a pleasanter mood than you were this morning, for I shall come home tired enough, and want both my dinner and my wife. What was the matter with you? Lost in thought, I suppose. You generally are."

"Was I?" said Janet, with a hard, ringing laugh. "I was not aware of it. It is a pity I ever found my way back. Here is your flask. I hope you will have some good sport," she added, as she turned away to the window, biting her quivering lip, and trying hard to repress the signs of the irritation which his words had provoked.

She remained there long after he was gone, watching his retreating figure as he went down the steep village street. As he passed out of sight, her eyes fell upon the white church steeple, which was shining out clearly in a distant gleam

of sunshine, though the nearer landscape was darkened by overhanging clouds.

It was a drowsy, sultry afternoon; hardly a breath of air stirred the long honeysuckle boughs, which drooped languidly across the window of the little inn parlour—a day in which to lounge idly through the sleepy hours, and enjoy the luxury of laziness. But Janet felt herself possessed by an uncontrollable restlessness. Resentment and regret, as bitter as unavailing, were lashing her into a state of feverish excitement. She turned from the window, and began pacing rapidly up and down the room. Sometimes she stood still for a moment, knotting her fingers tightly together, or flinging them apart with a gesture of impatience and despair, and then again resumed her restless walk.

Once, as she passed the window, her eye was caught again by the white church spire. A sudden fancy crossed her mind; she ran upstairs, tied on her hat, wrapped a little tweed cloak around her, and hurried out of doors.

She wanted to get rid of this restless misery; she would go for a long walk, tire herself and it

thoroughly out; then surely peace would come, if only that of weary sleep. And that little churchyard had looked so quiet and still—it would soothe her, she thought, to sit there for awhile alone.

As she was going out of the house she saw a stable-boy rubbing down a horse in the yard.

"Is there not a nearer way to Craigie church than by the road?" she asked.

"Ou, ay," returned the lad, pointing across the fields, with a wisp of straw he held in his hand, to a clump of birches a little way off. "Ye may gae by the burn, if ye will, an' ower the muir. It isna mair than twa three mile that way, an' it's five gude by the road. There's the stepping-stanes doun by yon birks, but they're aiblins flooded; there's been a gey drap of rain the nicht. Ye canna gae wrang," he added, as Janet made further inquiry; "just keep in the path, and ye'll win brawly. It 'll bring ye out at the top o' Craigie Crag. Ye maun haud on then till ye come to a wee housie wi' a red lum, an' then ye'll see the kirk right anent ye."

Janet thanked him for his information, and

set off in the direction he had pointed out. She found the stepping-stones by the clump of birches. The stream was brawling along between its banks, its waters reddened by the peat mosses through which it had taken its course. Apparently, it was higher than usual, for the tops of the stones were only just uncovered; still, stepping carefully across them, Janet managed to get dryshod to the other side. The path led her up a rather steep ascent, rough with whin-bushes and brambles, and thickly planted with tall, scrambling firs.

She pushed fiercely on, as if impatient to be out of these sheltered glades, and where nothing but the clear lift should press down upon her. A little hard climbing brought her out upon a piece of waste land, grown over with a short, wiry grass and ragged furze. Beyond this were the moors, stretching away as far as the eye could reach.

Her progress was somewhat impeded now, for the long heather grew rank and wild across the path. Sometimes she had to wade almost knee-deep among the purple sprays, scaring away the wild bee, that boomed off through the warm,

still air, with a dull, droning murmur. But she seemed to feel neither weariness nor heat; she hurried impatiently along, as though the rapid motion were itself a relief, till at length she rounded the shoulder of the hill, and found herself standing at the top of the Craigie Crag, which plunged in a precipitous descent at her feet.

Away to the west, as far as the eye could reach, stretched the heights of a blue mountain range; miles away the sun was shining over the swelling uplands; but overhead and behind her hung a thick canopy of lurid clouds. A cold *swiche* of wind swept through the air, until now so close and warm. She paused to rest, for she was out of breath with climbing up the rocky path, and sitting down on a bit of gray crag that cropped up above the herbage, she noticed for the first time the signs of a rapidly gathering storm.

She was still nearly a mile from any dwelling, and her first thought was to return at once to Strathedie; but already the rain was beginning to fall in huge solitary drops. She looked

around for shelter from the coming torrent, and saw that, by descending a little way down the steep side of the crag, she could reach a projecting ledge, where some vast masses of fallen rock, that had been dashed one upon the other in some pre-Adamite convulsion, made a snug cavern, which would afford her for the time a secure retreat.

She made her way with what haste she could over the great lichen-stained boulders, and through the tangle of fern and heath, to a kind of recess formed by gigantic splinters of stone, and gathering her dress closely around her, gazed out upon the scene before her, which was now becoming one of wild sublimity. Heavy masses of vapour were fast shutting out of sight the girdling hills as the storm came marching out of the distance. Presently, a low rumbling of far-off thunder filled the air, followed in an instant by a pealing crash, which reverberated from the steep sides of the crag, and then with a hollow roar surged down the hill, and subsided in long resounding mutterings in the valley below.

The rain began to descend in torrents; but

safe in her eyrie, Janet could look forth fearlessly on the raging elements without. She gazed on the tumult around her with a wild delight; the storm was telling out for her what she had no power to express for herself. It seemed to be lifting from her heart that nameless weight by which she was oppressed; it broke the spell of that voiceless unrest which had wrapped about her until she was well-nigh suffocated. She crouched down, leaning over a projecting boulder, silent, motionless, her countenance fixed in the intensity of her gaze, her whole frame quivering with excitement, as if her very soul were rushing forth from the body in which it was pent, that it might mingle with the storm.

Most women would have trembled at the peals of thunder that smote as with a thousand iron hammers on their mountain forge; they would have cowered before the blinding flashes that flooded the air with fire. Perhaps Janet might at any other time, but now the outward fury seemed only to soothe her into a calmer mood. As the storm grew wilder her agitation began to subside; it was as if a soft, cool hand were laid

upon her heart, and at its touch the passionate throbbings ceased.

For more than an hour the storm continued to rage, then gradually it began to abate. The low growling of the thunder, like that of some wild beast retiring to his lair, became fainter and fainter. The lightning grew less intense, and finally ceased entirely. The dense masses of cloud rolled themselves away from the nearer hills, and hung in a thick gray curtain over the further ranges. But still the rain, though no longer streaming down so violently as awhile ago, continued a steady, heavy fall. It was getting fast on towards evening, and Janet began to consider in some dismay how she should be able to return to Strathedie. The way by which she had come would be impassable now, for the brook she had crossed must be flooded by the rain, and the distance by the road would be at least five miles. She looked at her thin boots, her light summer dress, and shrank from the thought of toiling so far through mud and rain along a road so bleak and unfrequented.

However, to hesitate was useless. There

seemed but little prospect of the rain ceasing before sunset; and finally gathering courage from necessity, she came out of her sheltered nook, and ventured forth into the wet. She drew her little cloak closely around her, tied her hat more firmly on, and set herself steadily to face the blast which now swept keenly from the valley up the hill. She managed to press on her way for nearly a mile; but the wind and rain were so strong against her, the roads so clogged with the thick slimy mud, into which her feet sank at every step, that, spent and weary as she already was, she began to despair of arriving at Strathedie before nightfall.

The excitement of the last few hours had brought its re-action with it; and when she reached the cross-road that branched off to the village, and knew that four long miles lay still before her, she could have sat down helplessly by the wayside and cried. Her knees were trembling under her, the wet had soaked through her thin boots, and her damp cloak afforded small protection against the rain and cold. She was trying to urge herself on anew, when she was

startled by hearing a distant "hallo" behind her, and looking back, saw through the mist a low carriage approaching, the driver of which was evidently making his way towards her, with as much speed as the slippery road and abrupt descent would permit.

Janet stood for a moment with her back against the craggy bank, watching the approach of the vehicle.

"Which is the way to Atherton?" shouted the driver, as soon as he arrived within speaking distance, in a voice whose accent showed him to be an English gentleman.

Atherton was the village next beyond Strathedie, and Janet, who had once or twice been there, made a gesture with her hand to indicate the road. She felt as if she had hardly strength to speak loud enough to be heard amid the rattling of the wheels and the driving of the storm. Then gathering her dripping cloak around her, she prepared to resume her way.

She had hardly proceeded a dozen paces, however, when she heard the carriage draw up alongside of her. Spite of her wet and muddy pedes-

trian attire, the quiet grace of her gesture had revealed her to be a lady, though how she should be toiling along at such an hour through mud and rain, alone, the stranger could not divine.

"Pardon me," said he, as he drew up his horse by her side; "you seem to be going in the same direction as myself. I am sure you will forgive my offering you a seat in my phaeton as far as our roads lie together."

Janet had conjectured, as soon as the carriage stopped, that its occupant was about to offer her a seat, and had felt a sudden relief at the thought of thus easily accomplishing the remainder of her journey; but the next instant a natural hesitation struggled with her wish to accept the proffered courtesy—a stranger, at dusk, and on this lonely road! She turned upon him a look of anxious inquiry: surely, she thought, she had seen that face before—where, she could not tell; but as she scanned its features with a hasty glance, it seemed somehow familiar to her. He, too, was looking keenly down at her, as though he were seeking some explanation of the untoward circumstances in which he had found her placed.

But while Janet hesitated, the horse, impatient at being thus abruptly checked, stood restlessly pawing the ground. The stranger turned aside for an instant, reined it in tightly with one hand, and unbuckling the leather apron of the carriage, reached down the other, and drew her up to the seat beside him.

## CHAPTER II.

### STORMS.

THERE was perfect courtesy and deference in his manner, as he thus decided the question for her; yet from the moment his hand closed around her own, Janet felt as if under guidance to which she might safely trust herself. Through the whole of her exhausted frame there seemed to flow a stream of magnetic influence, calming down completely the feverish excitement by which she had been disturbed, and conveying a mingled feeling of repose and strength, which seemed at once her own and yet another's. She suffered herself to be placed without resistance in the seat beside her new-found friend, who, drawing a rug over her, and fastening

the cover of the phaeton, was already preparing to start.

At this moment, however, a blast of cold wind, sweeping down from the damp hill-side, struck an involuntary shiver through Janet's limbs. The stranger noticed it.

"You must be quite wet," said he, looking down at her cloak, which, indeed, was soaked with rain; "it is not safe for you to drive thus through this wind." And without another word, he drew from the back of the carriage a large wolfskin rug, which he folded quickly and securely around her shoulders.

She murmured some broken words of thanks, which apparently he did not hear, and in another moment he had urged on his horse, and was driving along at a pace as rapid as the stony and uneven nature of the rough mountain-road would allow.

Janet leaned back in the corner of the carriage, abandoning herself to that delicious sense of languid rest which, when all need for exertion has passed away, follows any great and unwonted strain of either mind or body.

The wind, which had been careering in sudden gusts around the shoulders of the hill behind them, had now sunk into a low sobbing sough, and the lulling sense of warmth—for the thick wolfskin rug in which she was enveloped prevented her from feeling any discomfort from her wet clothes — added to the stillness of the air and the rapid motion of the carriage, combined to enhance the state of half-dreamy repose in which she was enfolded. She surrendered herself without distraction to the soothing influences. Her mind seemed for the time in a state of perfect quiescence. The hateful past, the dreaded future were alike forgotten. She felt conscious just then of nothing beyond the relief and quiet of the present moment.

Her companion drove on in silence, apparently unconscious of her presence, only from time to time turning to look down at her as she leaned back in her corner, as though to satisfy himself that she was now in need of no further assistance from him. Evidently he was indisposed to enter into conversation; but, indeed, Janet felt his silence a relief, and was thankful that it permitted

her to remain in undisturbed tranquillity. It was enough for her that she could rest in quiet, free from the need to speak, or think, or act, just falling back on that sense of security with which somehow this stranger had unconsciously inspired her.

Through her half-closed eyes she saw before her, as in a waking dream, the tall, upright form of her companion, the firm, chiselled features, the noble head with its crisp, dark locks. Now and then, as he looked silently round, she caught the glance of his eyes meeting her own, then again withdrawn as he turned away from her. She felt the rapid rush of the carriage bearing her onward through the gathering twilight, at times going smoothly and swiftly along the level road, at others more slowly as the horse toiled with difficulty over rugged and uneven ground, hardly advancing at more than a walking pace.

At length they emerged into the broad highway that led into Strathedie, and the lights of the village began to gleam out before them from among the trees that clothed the hillside on which it was built.

"This is Strathedie," Janet said, at last, breaking the silence that hitherto had reigned between them, as the horse crossed the bridge at the foot of the hill, and began slowly to ascend the long village street.

The twilight, which was already gathering when they started from the Craigie Crag, had deepened with the rapidity of a Scottish autumnal evening, and as the carriage rattled along between the straggling houses, Janet, roused by the sight of the familiar objects around her, began to peer through the half darkness for the projecting porch of the village inn.

The stranger, who had been intent on guiding his horse across the high and narrow bridge, turned as she spoke and looked down curiously into the face beside him. Underlying her words, he had detected the tone of unconscious regret in which they were uttered.

"I hardly know how to thank you for your kindness, and to a stranger, too," began Janet, sensible that some acknowledgment was necessary, yet having an uneasy perception that any verbal expression of gratitude would be distasteful. She

was not mistaken, for though the stranger bent his head slightly at her words, an almost imperceptible movement of the eyebrows betrayed his impatience of the spoken thanks.

"It was a slight service," said he, carelessly but kindly. "I am glad I was able to render it you. Besides, it was really important to me to be sure about the road you pointed out."

"Indeed—" began Janet, hastily, but mindful of the warning brows, she checked herself abruptly.

"I see you do not like to be thanked. It is not pleasant, but——" and here interrupting herself again, she finished her sentence with an involuntary smile.

It spread over her whole countenance, eddying up to the dark weary eyes which grew bright as it sparkled through them, and apparently reflected some of their sunny light upon her companion, for he, too, smiled, though with a certain air of leisurely control over the risible muscles, which betokened a nature either too proud or too sad to be easily surprised into any very decided manifestation of mirth.

"Pray unburden yourself," said he, almost gaily; "I see you are oppressed beneath your weight of obligation."

Janet replied by a low rippling laugh. The look, the words, had quite melted away her sense of constraint. No sooner did she perceive the answering smile which her own had called forth, than there sprang up within her that pleasant feeling of at-homeness which a community of laughter, more readily perhaps than any other thing, usually produces between people who before may have been comparative strangers to each other.

This time it was with an accent of undisguised regret that she exclaimed as they reached the old-fashioned hostel, from the open door of which a long line of light streamed forth into the street,

"Ah, here is the inn. I must trouble you to stop."

Her companion drew up, while a stable-boy who had been loitering about the yard, and had heard the sound of carriage-wheels, ran out to hold the horse's head. He threw down the reins,

and getting out of the carriage came round to the other side, and began to release Janet from her encumbering wraps before he assisted her to alight.

She stood for a moment beside him on the pavement before the porch, the light streaming down on her figure, as the people of the inn, who had been alarmed at her continued absence, thronged into the entrance at the news of her return.

"Good evening," said the stranger, as she put her hand in his in mute farewell; then added—"When we meet again, I hope it may be under more favourable circumstances."

Janet withdrew her hand; her countenance fell. The stranger's words had recalled her to herself, and brought back to her the thought of all to which she was returning. The next moment, with a pleasant smile and a courteous gesture of farewell, he had seated himself once more in the carriage, and was driving rapidly down the street. Not too rapidly, however, to notice in the dusk a dark-faced man who was

striding along in an opposite direction to himself.

It was Janet's husband, who had been driven back by the storm more than an hour ago, and finding that his wife had been already some time absent, and had left without giving any clue to her destination, was pacing impatiently up and down the street, and becoming more and more exasperated as the minutes lagged slowly by and still no signs of the absentee. He had seen the phaeton standing at the door of the inn as he turned the corner at the end of the village, and in the bright light issuing from the door had witnessed the parting between the two figures, one of whom he conjectured rightly to be his wife.

He darted an angry glance into the phaeton as it passed him on the road, and made a sudden movement as if to stop it; but stumbling in the dark on the raised edge of the path, he lost his footing, and before he could recover himself the carriage was far beyond him, and only the sound of the receding wheels was to be heard as he

turned again and gazed after it through the gloom.

"The leddie's ben the hoose, sir," shouted the stable-lad, who had been watching him up the street, and, in common with all the inmates of the establishment, knew well enough why the English gentleman had been in "sic a quandary" for the last half hour. "She's ben the hoose, sir," he repeated, as Mr. Clyde came nearer. "Yon gentleman that's gaen down the town the noo brocht her back wi' him."

Mr. Clyde brushed past the lad, and going into the house, ran up to his wife's dressing-room. The door was standing open. There was no one in. He went to the sitting-room. She was there, leaning back in a large easy-chair, and listlessly undoing the knotted fastenings of her cloak.

She started up as her husband came into the room, pride, fear, and a certain feeling of regret struggling within as she noticed the abrupt and angry manner in which he entered.

"May I ask where you have been spending your evening?" he inquired, in a voice trembling with anger.

"I went to Craigie," replied Janet, half defiant, half terrified at his tone. "I went there for a walk, and was kept by the storm."

"And had the pleasure of driving back with a friend, I presume?" sneered her husband.

"You are mistaken," replied Janet, coldly, galled by the insinuation conveyed in his words. "I never saw him before; he took me up at the cross-roads as he was driving past."

But Mr. Clyde seemed not to have heard what she said, for coming close to her, his face pale with suppressed displeasure, he asked—

"Who is he? What is his name? It is no use trying to deceive."

"I told you he was a stranger. I do not know him," repeated Janet, in a voice which she vainly endeavoured to control to quietness.

It was the first time she had ever been brought face to face with passion like this. Her knees were trembling so that she was obliged to sit down again on the chair from which she had risen at his approach. And all the time that terrible face was stupefying her with its look, those angry eyes were transfixing her with affright.

"He was a stranger—quite a stranger," she murmured, hardly conscious of what she was saying. A little longer and she would have fainted under the ordeal. But as she spoke, there came a gentle tap at the door, followed by the appearance of the landlady.

"Will you be for dinner, sir, noo the leddie's come back?" she said, casting an inquisitive glance around the room.

"Serve it at once," answered Mr. Clyde, abruptly; and Janet, thankful for an excuse for putting an end to this miserable *tête-à-tête*, hastened out of the room on the plea of changing her damp clothes and arranging her dress before sitting down to table. She lingered as long as she dared, endeavouring as far as possible to remove all traces of disorder from her face and dress, and then returned to the room where dinner was laid out awaiting her arrival.

She sat down opposite her husband, and tried to force herself to eat a few morsels of food and drink a glass of wine. The meal passed in almost total silence. Mr. Clyde made no further allusion to the events of the evening, but

Janet, though relieved, dreaded at every moment lest the subject should be renewed. She excused herself from remaining when they rose from table. Her husband opened the door ceremoniously for her, stood holding it while she passed out, and then, unseen by her, followed his wife to the corridor leading to her room, where for more than an hour he remained pacing up and down outside her door.

Janet had hardly laid her head upon her pillow when, overcome by weariness, she sank into a heavy sleep. She woke towards morning from a troubled dream, in which gloomy fancies and fantastic horrors had been chasing each other wildly through her brain. As she turned her head uneasily upon her pillow, half opening her eyes, they fell upon the figure of her husband. He was sitting upright in the deep window-seat gazing at her with a face from which, in that dull, grey light, all life seemed to have departed. She closed her eyes again on what appeared to her drowsy sense but a phantom, mingling with the others in her dreams; and in another moment was once more asleep.

When she awoke again it was broad daylight; doors were clapping through the house, and voices sounding in the courtyard beneath her window. She started up, half annoyed with herself for having slept so late, and began hastily to dress.

When she first arose, her brain felt stupefied by the sudden rousing from sleep. She was sensible only of a dull heavy pain in her head, as if a cord were being strained tight around it, and of a bewildering consciousness that something untoward had occurred. But by degrees this resolved itself into a confused remembrance of the events of the preceding day. She clasped her hands across her head to relieve its painful throbbing; as she did so, her eyes fell upon the unpressed pillow by the side of her own. It was not a dream, then, that figure she had seen sitting so starkly opposite to her in the grey twilight.

Oppressed by an apprehension that she was unable to resist, she opened the door, and went downstairs.

Her husband was sitting by the breakfast-

table, his newspaper still unfolded by his side, awaiting her arrival. She felt strangely weak and ill as she came forward, and taking her place, began to attend to the duties of the table. The meal passed as before, in uneasy silence. Janet dare not look in her husband's face; the very sight of it struck a chill through her exhausted frame.

"Janet," he said at last, as he rose from his seat, "I shall return to Bedesby to-day. You will, perhaps, be ready to start at noon."

Janet only bowed her head in reply; she was feeling too dizzy and stupefied to question or care for the reason of this sudden determination. She went back to her room, and began slowly to arrange her trunks for departure.

Once or twice she paused as she knelt among her boxes, and leaned down her burning forehead on her hands. Oh, how she longed just for one moment to feel kind arms around her, to lay down her tired head, and be at rest! The sense of physical exhaustion brought with it the craving for some strength other than her own, some love and tenderness, that might shelter and enfold her.

But Janet had shut herself out from this; her own hand had barred the doors of happiness against her. She had taken up her burden; henceforth she must bear it as best she might—*alone*.

## CHAPTER III.

### ALONE IN THE DARK.

IT was already dusk when the leisurely Scotch train deposited its freight in the Edinburgh station; and Janet, faint and weary, felt thankful that the long tedious journey was accomplished at last. A little longer, and she should be able to lay down her aching head upon her pillow and find forgetfulness in sleep. It was throbbing dreadfully now. Lean it where she would against the padded cushions of the carriage, she could nowhere find relief.

She raised herself wearily, and began to collect her travelling appurtenances before the doors should be opened for the passengers to alight. Her husband checked her.

"You need not disturb yourself," he said, coolly; "we are not going to stay here."

"Not stay!" she repeated, in dismay, for she felt as if she could not endure the din and vibration of the carriage for another stage. "This is Edinburgh, is it not?"

"So it is. But we are going through to Bedesby to-night," replied Mr. Clyde, carelessly, as he took the tickets from his breast-coat pocket and showed them to the guard.

"To Bedesby!" echoed Janet. "Oh, surely not!" But her husband made no reply, only buttoned up his coat again, pulled his travelling-cap down over his ears, and walked to the door of the carriage, where he stood leaning over with folded arms, quietly watching the stir upon the platform which the arrival of the train had caused, as porters and passengers moved hurriedly to and fro in the lamplight.

Janet drew back into her corner. It was useless, she knew, to remonstrate. There was nothing for it but bearing it as well as she could. But she felt herself sinking, sinking, she knew not where. Things seemed to swim giddily about

her, and every sound in the station was as if it were struck sharply upon her aching brain. Five hours more!—how should she keep up so long? Yet somehow they wore away; and just as a feeble glimmer of dawn rose grayly in the east, the train rushed hissing and panting into the Bedesby station.

They were the only passengers who got out. There was a momentary bustle on the platform, and then the shrill whistle gave the signal for departure; and again the train moved slowly on, its red eye gleaming angrily through the gloom as it passed out of the wide empty station.

"Are there any cabs?" asked Mr. Clyde of one of the drowsy porters.

"Cabs, sir? no," returned he. "There's none here this time o' night. They never comes without they're ordered."

"We must walk, then; it will not take us long. The luggage may remain till morning. Come, Janet," said he, turning to her with a gesture for her to accompany him.

Janet rose languidly from the heap of packages on which she was seated. As she did so the

light from a solitary lamp, that was flaring above her head, fell full upon her face, revealing its deadly pallor and drawn look of pain. Mr. Clyde noticed it. Perhaps something in its expression of hopeless weariness touched him—perhaps the thought smote across him that it was a groundless suspicion which had urged him to this sudden journey—for he drew her arm quietly, almost kindly, within his own, and added in a softer tone, as he led her out of the station—

"You are tired, I daresay. We have not far now to go."

The porter waited for them to pass out, and then clanged to the heavy iron gate behind them, and went back to his lounging-place at the luggage office.

"Yon's Mr. Clyde from t' Abbey Close," said he, jerking his thumb over his shoulder as he joined his companion; "an' yon's his wife with him. I see'd 'em here day they was married. She'll have a toughish job with him, I reckon, afore she's done. I lay she didn't know what sort of a bargain it was she was making when she took up with him. She looks as if she was

pretty nigh beat out already. He's a awful swell, he is; I'd a sister lived with the old lady, an' I know a thing or two about him as he wouldn't tell hisself."

It was a clear moonlight night, and the fresh cool air when they got out into the streets revived Janet for awhile as she walked along by her husband's side. The streets of Bedesby were always quiet. One might almost imagine, from the utter absence in them of the modern element of bustle, that the old place had gone comfortably to sleep in the middle ages, and had never properly waked up since. But now there was an almost eerie stillness in the air as they walked on in the shadow of the high overhanging houses, their footsteps ringing strangely on the pavement in the silence around them.

Once, as they went under the black archway of the Friar's Bar, a solitary policeman encountered them, and peered curiously in their faces as they passed him by. Here and there a faint light, gleaming through the drawn blinds of some upper window, hinted of the waking life that was going on within. But except for these

rare signs of vitality, all around them was deserted and blank. For Bedesby was a sober, well-behaved little city, and at three o'clock in the morning its inhabitants were mostly in bed and asleep. The old houses with their closed shutters seemed asleep too, and so did the shadows which lay motionless in the moonlight beneath their carved peaked gables and projecting stories.

A sudden turn in the crooked street they were traversing brought them out just opposite the Minster, which reared its mighty bulk of gray sculptured stone above the dark roofs of the houses. Its fretted spires and slender pinnacles were shimmering in the white moonlight, its great west window flashing as with a thousand gems.

Janet shivered and drew her large travelling cloak more closely round her, as a cold rush of wind swept round the north end of the transept, and whistled shrilly through the crisping leaves of the tall elm-trees that grew in the Cathedral Close. She had been hot and stifled in the railway carriage; now her limbs were trembling with cold. She was faint, too, and dizzy, and

leaned heavily upon her husband's arm as he drew her along through the narrow winding streets. At last they reached the Abbey Close, where Mrs. Clyde resided.

It was a large court, built round on three sides with high dark houses, and entered by a tall stone gateway, guarded by two stone griffins, which stood up solemnly on their hind legs, holding each a drawn sword between its paws.

Mrs. Clyde's house was the centre one, just opposite the gateway. Janet crept wearily up the great flight of steps leading to it, while her husband gave a violent ring at the bell, following it by a thundering knock that woke all the echoes in the gloomy enclosure.

Presently a nightcapped head was thrust out of an upstairs window, and a woman's voice was heard exclaiming—

"It's the master, Harriet, it's the master!"

There was a sound of feet scuffling through the house; and a few minutes after the door was opened by an old serving-man, who had evidently just shuffled himself into his red plush breeches at the sound of his master's knock. At the

same instant Janet saw, standing in the moonlight which streamed through the window at the top of the stairs, a cadaverous looking figure, clad in a long gray dressing-gown, bending forward over the banisters. It was Mrs. Clyde herself, who had been roused out of her sleep by their unexpected arrival, and now approached them, exclaiming, in an acrid tone—

"Brian! Janet! Is that you? What has brought you back so soon, and at this time of night, too? You might have gone to the Station Hotel. You have nearly frightened us out of our wits."

And with this greeting from her new mother, the three-weeks' bride entered the doors of her husband's home.

Janet's strength held out to the last moment, and then gave way. Before many hours were over she lay tossing on her bed fast held in the strong grasp of fever; and in the unconsciousness of delirium finding a respite from the wearing misery of the past few weeks.

Her thoughts broke loose from the bondage of reality, and returned to those sunny September

days that had witnessed her girlish dream of joy. Her murmured talk was of the Marton lanes, the Oriel room in the deserted Hall, the gleaming river, the autumn woods, through which once more she was wandering, and not alone. But, by-and-bye, these bright visions faded away. The tide of fever ebbed slowly back, and left her stranded on the shores of a life which, for her, seemed now one boundless, barren waste.

Yet though the violence of her malady had spent itself, and the vague babblings of delirium were no longer heard within the darkened chamber where she lay, Janet did not recover strength. For some time it seemed as if the feeble flame of life might at any moment flicker out, or, worse still, burn on alone while the light of reason had been extinguished. She breathed, she moved, she took food sparingly, and at long intervals, but no gleam of returning intelligence lit up the vacant face. It seemed as if the powers of vitality had been paralysed within her, yet the physician declared that there was no reason for alarm. The attack had evidently, he

said, been the result of great exhaustion and excitement, though the seeds of disease had probably been lying for some time in the system. She must be kept perfectly quiet for a few weeks, and with her sound constitution, there was every prospect of her ultimate recovery.

The tidings of Janet's illness reached her aunt and father just after they had left Marton for an inland watering-place in the south, whose mineral springs Mr. Brande had been advised by his physician to try without delay. Accordingly, as soon as he was able to travel, Miss Mildred and he had removed thither with the intention of remaining until his health should be completely re-established. The Priory House had been shut up; Bessie had been sent home on board wages, and Hannah, whose services had become almost indispensable to the comfort of her master and mistress, had gone with them to the furnished lodgings, where they expected to remain for the next two or three months at least.

Could they have foreseen Janet's illness, they would have remained at home, and risked the fogs and damps of a Marton autumn, in order

to be near her. Indeed, as it was, Mr. Brande was anxious to return at once, so that they might be ready to receive her as soon as she should be a little recovered; but Miss Mildred, yielding to Mr. Clyde's assurances that there was in reality no cause for alarm, and that every possible attention was being paid her by his mother, persuaded her brother to remain where he was for the present, and derive what advantage he could from the change of residence, which already was proving so beneficial.

But meanwhile, the period fixed for Mr. Clyde's departure drew near, yet Janet, though recovering by insensible degrees, and beginning again to take notice of things around her, lay still fast bound upon her sick bed. The physician shook his head at the mention of her removal; and Mr. Clyde himself saw that it would be next to impossible for her to undertake the fatigue of a voyage in her present state. He must give up his appointment, or go out to it leaving her behind him; and neither of these alternatives he felt exactly inclined to accept.

However, there was no other choice; the ap-

pointment was too valuable, and had been obtained with too much difficulty, to be lightly relinquished. His passion for Janet, though not extinguished, had been considerably cooled. The vessel sailed next week; something must be decided on, and that at once.

He thought the matter over as he walked up and down the long, narrow garden, where already the fallen autumn leaves lay thick upon the path; but at the end of an hour he had still not made up his mind as to the course to be pursued. He threw away the end of his cigar, walked back into the house, and upstairs to his wife's chamber. It looked dim and comfortless, with its dull, green-panelled walls, its lustreless furniture, and the great walnut bedstead, which stood forth with its drab hangings, like a faded hearse in the darkened room.

The hired nurse was nodding in a high cushioned chair by the fire, which burnt low and red in the gaping grate; the curtains were closed around the bed. Mr. Clyde drew them aside, and stood looking at the figure within.

Janet was lying with her eyes open, her

brown hair, which had been cut short during her illness, tumbling round her on the pillow, and one arm thrown listlessly across the coverlet. She made an impatient moan, and turned restlessly aside as the light fell suddenly upon her face. Evidently, she did not wish to be disturbed, nor did any smile of recognition betray her knowledge that it was her husband who was looking in upon her.

Mr. Clyde did not speak; he stood for a moment looking at the faded, uneasy face, which lay half buried in the crumpled pillow; then he drew back the curtain, and went out of the room. A sick wife would be a terrible inconvenience on the voyage, and a useless drag when he got to India. Before he reached the foot of the stairs he had resolved upon the course he meant to take.

He went straight into the breakfast-room where his mother usually spent her mornings, that he might communicate to her his plans. This breakfast-room was Mrs. Clyde's *sanctum*. Here she made up her accounts and wrote her letters. Here she scolded her servants, and sharply catechized the unwilling applicants for

the relief which in the end she generally suspiciously bestowed. Here also she employed herself in the manufacture of certain articles of coarse wearing apparel, which at stated intervals she doled out to her various pensioners. At the moment her son entered she was engaged in measuring and tearing up a web of gray flannel, into lengths suitable for the making of the winter petticoats which she was accustomed to distribute on Martinmas-day to certain old women in the vicinity of the Abbey Close.

There was a greasy, disagreeable odour from the new flannel diffusing itself in the air, that unpleasantly saluted Mr. Clyde's olfactory nerves, causing him to look profoundly disgusted as he opened the door and stood just within the room.

"What do you want here, Brian?" said Mrs. Clyde, looking up in some surprise at her son's intrusion into her sanctuary.

"Only about Janet," he replied, still standing beside the open door. "What a horrid smell this stuff makes! Why can't you send it into the kitchen to be done? It is enough to stifle one. I shall leave her here and sail by myself."

"It is the only thing you can do, I suppose," replied his mother; "she is not fit to go with you, and as to throwing up your appointment on her account, of course that is not to be thought of. Things generally do happen about as awkwardly as they very well can. One might really think she had contrived her illness on purpose to cause inconvenience."

And Mrs. Clyde, who had measured off another three-yard length, tore it across with a resounding screech that formed an emphatic commentary upon her speech.

"Why, as for that, she might have managed it worse. It would have been a confounded bore to have had her falling ill after we had sailed. What on earth should I have done with such a piece of business on my hands during the voyage? You will have to keep her here for two or three months, and I must make arrangements for her out yonder, and send word as soon as I land about her coming over. You will have to look pretty sharply after her when she gets well, and it would be better to give them all to understand that I expect her to make this her home

until she sails. I am not going to have her cut her tether, and dance off by herself to get into what mischief she pleases."

Mrs. Clyde accepted the trust committed to her somewhat ungraciously. She was not pleased at having the charge of her invalid daughter-in-law thrust upon her for so long. Still, this was better than leaving the young wife during her husband's absence in the hands of her own relations, who might possibly, when the time came, raise objections to parting with her for so long a voyage at such an inclement season of the year.

As to Janet, she was not consulted on the matter. Her inclination—if, indeed, she had any—of course must yield to her husband's will, and he had resolved that, as soon as possible, she should join him at Bombay.

The following week he had embarked on board the *Ocean King*, and, travelling by the overland route, expected to reach his destination about the middle of November.

Janet was beginning to amend before he left, and after his departure, slowly, day by day, she

gathered back her strength, until at last she was able to be brought downstairs, and one bright October day came with tottering steps into the dining-room, and sank down on the great easy chair which had been set for her by the nurse before the fire.

That is usually a joyous day in a family when, for the first time, some loved member is released from the imprisonment of the sick-room, and with faded smiling face appears once more in the midst of daily household life; but poor Janet met no joyful greeting as she came feebly forward, leaning on the nurse's arm. Mrs. Clyde sat unmoved and almost silent. She was not prepared to seem gratified at a convalescence which had come so tardily. Indeed, she had looked on Janet's illness from the first as almost a personal injury to herself. Why could she not have made an effort to recover in time, instead of pining along in that listless way until Brian had been obliged to sail without her, and the very object she had had in view in promoting the marriage had been thus far defeated? She



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was feeling more disposed, therefore, to visit upon the unconscious offender the disappointment which her illness had occasioned, than, by any show of sympathy, to cheer the spirits of the feeble invalid.

She sat looking on, with no touch of pity on her set, stern features, while the nurse arranged the cushions so that Janet might recline her head upon them, only remarking, as she watched her languid movements—

"I cannot think why Dr. Davis should have been in such a hurry to get you downstairs again. You had far better have kept in your own room until you got a little stronger. There is no occasion to have the whole house turned into an hospital."

Poor Janet! And a moment before she had been thinking of the young mother whom she had never known, and longing, with the longing of an utterly desolate and saddened heart, to feel around her for one moment the close clasp of love; and then if the good God, who is pitiful to all his tired children, would but lift from her the burden which already was becoming too heavy

for her to bear, and let her lie down where even the weariest may find repose.

Those to whom sorrow is new often cry out thus for relief. It is not until later years that we learn to value more truly the great gift of existence, and to bear patiently the smart from which we cannot escape, content to know that while the pain passes away, the sense of larger life which it leaves behind it remains our own for ever.

Janet had no heart to reply to her mother-in-law's words. She closed her eyes to hide the tears that were trembling beneath their lids; that sharp voice smote so cruelly upon her. It was so hard to feel that in all the wide world there was no one to be kind to her now.

And yet, though she knew it not, a hand was leading her through this sense of want towards that Source of infinite content which only is sufficient to satisfy the cravings of the human heart. This need for the shelter of earthly love, which the great God has inwrought in the nature of all his creatures, not less in that of the brave and strong than of the timid and defenceless, is but

as a finger pointing upwards to that other and diviner love of which all else is but the faint, imperfect symbol. And just as in the material universe no atom is too minute and mean to be attracted towards its central sun, so in the spiritual world there is no soul clad in a body so weak and insignificant, dwelling in such a lowly forgotten corner of life, that He to whom nothing is small and nothing great, will not, if it yield itself to Him, draw it gently, mightily to Himself.

## CHAPTER IV.

### SUNDAY AFTERNOON.

IT was the last day of October—a dreary, chill, autumnal day—and Janet sat in one of the high-backed chairs in the dining-room, looking out into the long, gloomy garden. She had a book on her lap, an old, yellow-leaved volume, which she had taken down at random out of the bookcase.

Mrs. Clyde had, more than once, hinted in a distant way her dislike to seeing her moping about with nothing to occupy her attention. Besides, the book was a pretext for being silent; and this afternoon Janet was not in a mood for talking, even if her mother-in-law had been disposed for it herself. But Mrs. Clyde was sitting

upright in her chair by the table, reading too—at least, she had a book in her hand as well as Janet, though from the suspicious way in which it tottered at intervals, it might be questioned whether she was deriving much benefit from the "Meditations in a Village Churchyard," wherewith she was beguiling her Sunday leisure.

Mrs. Clyde never went to afternoon church; she did not find it a profitable time to go, perhaps, because of these attacks of somnolency, by which she was occasionally surprised during the interval between dinner and tea; and this interval was on Sundays considerably longer than usual, for on that day she was accustomed to dispense with luncheon, and have an early dinner, so that the servants in her establishment might have an hour at their own disposal before they should be required to assemble under her eye in the long pew in the Belfry church.

Therefore, although it was hardly half-past four by the bronze timepiece on the high, carved mantelshelf, yet dinner had been solemnly served, and solemnly eaten, and solemnly taken away; and two tall decanters, and two tall glasses, and

two dishes of walnuts and Indian sweetmeats had been set upon the table by the old serving man more than an hour ago. And then Janet, glad to escape from the sense of constraint with which the sight of the grim face opposite oppressed her, took her book and sat down by the window, with its small panes and broad, black frames, and high, narrow sashes, and its outlook into the dreary garden; for it was too cold to go and sit upstairs in her own room, and the breakfast-room fire always smoked in damp weather; and on Sundays Mrs. Clyde never had a fire lighted in the drawing-room, in order to save unnecessary work; for though not an amiable, she was a sincere woman, striving, in her dark uneasy way, to fashion her life according to such bewildered notions of religion as she possessed.

She belonged to that type of character not uncommon in cases where a disappointed life has been engrafted on a naturally gloomy disposition. She had endured great wrongs and great trials, but with her, suffering instead of sweetening had embittered her spirit. The sorrows that, when past, might have become her most precious pos-

sessions, had left behind them only a rankling wound, a sullen, stern dissatisfaction with all within and all without herself. She was one more given to decry this fair world of God's making as a waste howling wilderness full of pitfalls, gins, and snares, wherein our only chance of safety is to gather our garments so closely around us that no contact with others may sully their purity—more disposed to shut her eyes and ears to all pleasant sights and sounds, and to mortify and repress all those instincts after good which are, in truth, the messengers of God sent to bid us to the feast He has provided for us—than by large-hearted, large-handed charity to strive to make it for others what it might, and ought to be for all, a scene of joyful activity, a place in which to develope all that is sweet and noble in our God-given nature.

Yet Mrs. Clyde was charitable, too, in a certain bleak, unkindly way; and her face, keen and dismal as a blast of easterly wind, was familiar enough in the rickety tenements down the alleys and lanes in the vicinity of the Abbey Close. But the little children playing in the

gutters ceased their sport, and started off "promiscuously" when she was seen approaching; and their lean-faced mothers received her dingy tracts with a stolid indifference that would have degenerated into positive rudeness but for the half-crowns and shillings, and frequent gifts of warm clothing, which neutralized the effect of her unwelcome though well-meant efforts to enlighten their minds.

Her very dress partook of the same harsh, ungainly character. It contained such unhappy mixtures of dejected colours; it had such painful lines and angles in every direction, such an indescribable air of stiffness and severity, that Janet used to wince involuntarily when her eye turned on it. For Mrs. Clyde was not gifted by nature with a fine sense of the beautiful; moreover, she felt it her duty to mark her disapproval of feminine vanity and the folly of fashion by always wearing dresses sufficiently out of date to offend a critical taste, which demands, if not gratification, at least repose in female attire.

It had, doubtless, been a mortification to her

at one time to do this. Every woman, be she gentle or simple, well-favoured or the reverse, is endued with the instinctive desire to be pleasant in the eyes of others; and this law, which nature meant to be obeyed, she will not suffer to be resisted with impunity. But during Mrs. Clyde's twenty years of widowhood the womanliness had been all dried out of her, and the milk of human kindness which flows in many a withered breast, had curdled and dried up into a bitter mass of asceticism and distrust.

She had stiffened herself into an attitude of perpetual defiance towards everything that was sweet, and warm, and bright, and shut herself up in an unlighted world of her own; and into this frozen, unyielding life her son's wife had come, disturbing it at every point. The girl had turned out so differently, too, from what she had at first expected; that promise of docile submissiveness which had deluded her into the idea that Janet would readily give the obedience due from a wife to a husband like her son, had changed since her illness into a sort of passive wilfulness, the more provoking because Mrs.

Clyde had no weapons that she could oppose against it.

Her hints, her covert remarks, her example, fell powerless upon that cushion of unheeding apathy, like shot against a feather bed. If Janet would but commit herself by some hasty word or ill-considered action, there would then be something to take hold of, and possibly work out a reformation from. But her aimless, indifferent ways, her sad-eyed, uncomplaining face, her moods of fitful restlessness, afforded no definite ground for complaint. And her very gracefulness, and wild, fawn-like beauty, which at her husband's side would have been to Mrs. Clyde a recommendation, was here but an added source of annoyance.

And since her recovery from the fever that beauty had ripened into perfection; there was a richness in the rounded form, a sweet stateliness about her whole person that was absent in her girlish days, and extorted from even Mrs. Clyde herself the involuntary homage of a dissatisfied admiration.

But, whatever feelings of concealed dislike

might be gathering in her breast, Mrs. Clyde kept them rigidly—at least she meant to do so—to herself. It would not do, she reflected, to alienate her son's wife, for after all, she *was* his wife, and, whether she suited or not, would have now to fill the place of one. There are thoughts, however, which, when harboured in the breast, are apt to make themselves heard aloud. The chambers of imagery in the human heart cannot be kept so closely shut but through some unnoticed chink the inward feelings will disclose themselves. Janet knew that beneath the stony courtesy of her mother-in-law there lay concealed a rooted aversion towards herself which, if not expressed in word or deed, acted as by a sort of magnetic repulsion upon her sensitive nature.

It seemed a simple thing that on this particular afternoon she should be turning away with her face towards the window, yet all these causes had combined to move her to it. She wanted to shut for awhile out of her sight the face that was to her like a perpetual accusation, and the shadow of the long limp window-

curtain fell round her now like a welcome seclusion.

Poor Janet! She felt herself a dead weight in that gloomy household, and yet no feasible plan suggested itself for quitting a home in which her presence seemed a constant burden, until the strong hand of marital authority should summon her across the seas—to what? Janet shuddered and shrank from the thought of all that lay then before her. But it was a long time to come yet. This was November, nearly. It must be January before they could hear from him; far on in March before she could possibly reach India herself. Four months, full of long days, and something would surely happen in the meantime. Fate could not be so unkind as to thrust her helplessly into his power again.

She roused herself, stung by the thought, pushed back her hair impatiently from her forehead, shook off her unquiet fears, and gazed out intently, as though she were seeking something, into the cheerless leaf-strewn garden; but there was nothing to see, only the high smoke-

blackened walls, with here and there a withered creeper dangling from them, a few wan chrysanthemums and draggled hollyhocks in the sombre flower-plots, and now and then a moist dead leaf dropping slowly from the dripping boughs as the chill air crept damply through the ragged elms.

There had been a drizzling rain all the early part of the day, with sharp gusts of wind that had well-nigh stripped the trees of their yellowing foliage; but now the rain had almost ceased, leaving the ground all sodden with wet. The wind, too, had sunk into a low, restless moan, wailing incessantly around the house, as though the day were dying, dying hard.

Most people are susceptible, more or less, to atmospheric influences. Janet was unusually so. It seemed to her now, looking out into the desolate garden, as though all happy life had departed from nature. She shut her eyes upon the dreary scene, and then at once she felt herself carried back to brighter times. She was sitting by the river-side on that sunny September afternoon, which seemed now so long ago, that she almost

felt as if it had belonged to another life. The curved ripples on the stream were glancing in the light; the linnet singing overhead. She saw again the brown stubble fields, and the line of low grey hills. Kind eyes were looking into hers; a warm hand clasping her own. She felt the close pressure of his arm, the touch of his lips upon her forehead, and then she opened her eyes. How cold and dreary the twilight creeping out of the dripping sky; the black window-frames, the chairs, the dull red curtains, all so real and so desolate!

The darkness gathered thicker, the lamps shone out in the lane behind the garden wall. She felt the tears, one by one, falling as she sat, and then all at once the Minster bell began to ring for evening service, and Mrs. Clyde started up, stirred the fire to a blaze, and rang for lights.

Janet knew that then her sharp eyes would detect the traces of weeping on her face. A sudden thought came across her mind.

"Do not wait tea for me if I am not back," she said. Janet could never bring herself to call

the house in the Abbey Close by the sweet name of home. "I think I shall go to the Minster service. I have never seen it lighted up yet, and they say the music is so good."

It was a pity she added this last sentence. Mrs. Clyde was a strict churchwoman, and would have had no objection to her going to the Cathedral service. Indeed, she would go herself sometimes, only that it was at such an inconvenient hour. But that Janet should be drawn thither by æsthetic instead of devotional considerations jarred upon her sense of propriety.

She moved her chair a little farther from the fire, and seated herself deliberately before she answered in a caustic tone—

"Certainly, Janet; I am sorry I cannot accompany you myself; only, as you wish to make the service a means of amusement instead of a means of grace, it is unfortunate that there should be a sermon this afternoon. They always begin with Advent Sunday."

Janet made no reply. She had nothing to say, and as to the sermon, she did not regret it. It would only make the service longer, and she

would rather sit in the Minster, alone among the crowd, than with her mother-in-law in the gloomy dining-room of the house in the Abbey Close.

She went upstairs without waiting for a light, and dressed hastily in the dusk. The bell did not begin to ring till a quarter of an hour before service, and it would take her ten minutes to walk. For Bedesby had been built in leisurely days, before railroads, telegraphs, and steam printing-presses had arisen, to lash on tired mortals in a breathless race through life, and its long, crooked streets wound about in a fashion peculiarly their own, scorning in any case to advance in a straightforward way to a conclusion. Consequently, though the Minster towers appeared to be within a stone's throw of the Abbey Close, Janet, hurrying along beneath the high overhanging houses, heard the great bell strike five just as she reached the broad flight of steps that led up to the south entrance of the cathedral.

## CHAPTER V.

### SERVICE IN THE NAVE.

HER rapid walk had done her good. It had sent the blood with a fuller current through her veins, and scattered the clouds of half sullen despondency that had been gathering over her spirit. She felt, as she ran up the steps, as if a breeze of fresh air had blown through her, and stirred the surface of her stagnant life.

She shook down her dress, pushed open the heavy, iron-bossed door, and in a moment she had passed out of darkness into light, out of the damp, narrow streets, into the warmth and glow, the aerial spaciousness and glory of that vast grey edifice of sculptured stone.

It seemed as if the ponderous doors that closed

behind her had shut her out from the dull, every-day world, and she were standing overshadowed by the awful beauty of eternity. A strange sense of infinite harmony and repose possessed her, a feeling of dim, untold delight. The soft tones of organ music filled the air, veiling the muffled hum arising from the vast throng of worshippers that filled the long aisles of the nave.

She stood still for a moment, hardly daring to breathe, drinking in thirstily the sweet unaccustomed influences that thrilled through all her sentient being. And then the sound fell into silence. A white-robed procession of priests and choristers filed through the iron gates of the distant choir; and Janet went forward to find herself a seat.

But this was no easy matter, for it was late and the places seemed to be all taken up. She stood looking round in some perplexity, until she was noticed by a verger, in a dangling black robe, who beckoned with his wand, and ushered her to a bit of brown bench that emerged from beneath the spreading drapery of a stout and

crinolined dame, who good-naturedly drew aside her voluminous flounces, and made room for Janet to sit down beside her.

And then the service began. The voice of the officiating clergyman cleaved through the rustle and stir made by the rising of the people. The choir chanted forth their loud Amens, the echoes died away along the aisles; and Janet, alone among the crowd, communed in silence with the unseen Presence that filled that great heart of stone.

But by degrees strange fancies began to possess her mind. Janet was always easily swayed by surrounding influences. Hers was not one of those serene, self-possessed natures that remain delightfully the same under whatever circumstances they may be placed; and now, as she sat gazing into the dim heights of the vaulted roof, the vast cathedral, with its springing arches and clustered columns, and sculptured capitals, appeared to lose its dead material aspect and become instinct with life. The heart of the old builders seemed still pulsing in their works. The still face of the saint, looking down from his canopied

niche, retained the touch of that ancient humanity that had wrought itself into the patient stone. The leaves twining around the head of the columns still trembled with the life that had guided the sculptor's tool. The gaunt forms, struggling forth on the projecting bosses, shivered with that terror of the Unseen that had made the soul of the workman quail within him.

For in those days men wrought with their hearts as well as with their hands, and in the dumb insensate stone shaped out the life that stirred within their breasts. And so, as Janet looked up at the silent faces that for long centuries had bent down over the changing throng of worshippers, she felt how completely these works of hands long crumbled into dust linked the ages together. The dross and impurity that had marred the lives of these long-ago dead, lay buried beneath the dust of forgotten centuries; only the immortal truth and beauty, the self-sacrifice and devotion which formed the essence of their work, remained. And then Janet wondered whether her life, too, would thus bloom when the grass grew green over her forgotten grave.

She looked back through the long years in which she had lived for herself alone; yet after it all she stood there that Sunday afternoon, her hands empty enough, the red wine of joy spilled upon the ground, the cup lying broken at her feet. It was no use now, she thought, crying out any longer for happiness—life held none for her. She must just go on as patiently as she could, and try to put a little sunshine into the lives of others.

She could do that, even if her own were to be but one long shadow. And just then it seemed to her such a natural thing to do. She almost wondered she had never thought of it before—to learn to think of others instead of seeking only to grasp something for herself.

All this time the service was going on, the full-voiced chant of the choristers flowing like a sea of harmony around her, the measured tones of the clergyman who read the service ringing musically through the silence which ensued. But in Janet's ear it sounded only like a soothing inarticulate murmur, such as a mother might croon over her sleeping child. The tumult in her heart, which for long had drowned everything but the

wild cry of passion or despairing grief, had died away, and in the silence she caught the whisper of the still small voice within, which only those who listen can hear. We all hear this voice at times—in faint, far-off accents, it may be—which yet, if we attend, grow ever clearer and more distinct. Janet heard it then in the solitude of her own heart, and in her broken, uncertain way she answered.

But now the prayers were over and the organ began to play, softly at first, a voluntary which Janet knew well. It was an air of Beethoven's, and before she was aware her thoughts became entangled among the chords. It was a favourite of Canon Birney's, and the last time she had been at the Rectory, Alison had played it. The thread of association was unbroken still, and unconsciously her fancy floated back upon it to that happy evening in the Canon's drawing-room. She remembered sitting on the low window-seat by his side, listening to the sweet stately march of the melody, and thinking that no one ever put so much meaning into music as Alison. All at once she recollected that this was about the time he

always came to Bedesby for his three months' residence. She wondered whether she should see him, and reproached herself as if for ingratitude at not having thought of it before. While she was musing over it, speculating on the chance of his arrival, she heard through the soft concluding tones of the voluntary, a slight rustle among the people at the farther end of the nave. She looked up.

The Canon himself was coming up the aisle towards the pulpit. It was like dreaming of a friend's voice calling afar off, and waking to find him close at hand. Suddenly everything about her glowed with a warm familiar light. She felt at home there, sitting among the thousands of strange faces by which she was surrounded; for had she not a sort of possession in that tall figure who was coming slowly up the aisle, every eye following his advancing steps? He was her friend, she was sure of that, and if he saw her he too would be glad. Already she felt herself sheltering in the sense of his presence. It was so pleasant to be near some one who cared for her, even though he did not know she was there.

And he looked such a king as he came along, head and shoulders above the crowd—she felt so glad and proud in him.

And Janet was right in it all. For truly Nature had been in a generous mood when she made the Canon, gifting him not only with the kingly mind, but with the noble presence, the towering stature, the grand sweet countenance, the perfect physical frame, which formed a fitting home for the royal soul that dwelt within. And instinctively men yielded to him the homage which is seldom withheld from those who are born to sway. In olden times he might have lived on through the ages, in rune or song, a hero or a demigod. As it was, his lot being cast in the nineteenth century, and in this peaceful, prosaic diocese of Bedesby, his tribute was brought in the modern guise of the living of Marton, a canonry, an impending bishopric—which, notwithstanding he was a man in advance of his time, yet speaking out boldly in the midst of it, people whispered would soon be his,—but, above all, in that glad allegiance rendered him by men, and in that garland of well-won

praise which all hands vied in placing on his brows.

The Canon's honours, however, sat easily upon him. He did not trouble himself about the fit of his laurels, or worry himself by vain attempts to display every leaf in them to the admiring crowd. He was greater than they, and could afford even to forget that he wore them. Janet watched him rise up before that mighty multitude as quietly as if he had been going to address the little handful of rustics in Marton church. It was all one to him. In that awful Presence, which bent alike over all, the surpliced dignitaries beside him and the spruce shop-lads in their Sunday best, the hollow-eyed dressmaker, weary with her hundred hours of toil, and the high-bred lady who was prepared to listen with such graceful serenity to his discourse, stood all on the same level. Every soul there had sinned and sorrowed and struggled alike. All were hastening on, some through the green lanes of life, others along the dusty high-roads, to one common end. And the Canon stood there, to reach out a helping hand, to give a word of kindly

counsel as they passed along, which might be treasured and remembered when the speaker had been long forgotten.

He paused a moment before opening the great Bible that lay on the cushion before him, and swept his eye over the congregation with a look that seemed, like an embrace, to gather them all to himself. He did not see Janet among the crowd, but she, looking into that keen, benignant face, felt her trust in others returning. There had arisen for her a firm standing-point, whence she could look out over the shifting, uncertain expanse around her, and feel that here, at least, was a sure footing for faith in her fellow-creatures. It was such a new joy to have something again on which to rest. Life was not so bad as it had seemed awhile ago. It was strange, she thought, what a difference the last hour had made in her.

But meanwhile the Canon had turned over the leaves of the book and read forth the words, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." He read them very slowly, resting his voice upon them as if to press them into the minds of his

hearers; and then he went through the story of that wedding feast at Cana, where, for all time to come, festivity and joy were consecrated by the Divine Guest, who sat there a man among men.

He read how when the wine ran short, the servants, at Christ's command, filled their vessels with water—filled them to the brim—and having with ready and obedient hands performed this small behest, they drew out in its stead the good wine. And from all this he showed that the homely duties, the set routine, the toil of brain or hand or heart, which form so large a portion of the life of most of us, though mean things in themselves, become great and worthy when ennobled by a lofty purpose. It is but water with which the best of us can fill our vessels, nothing but water, yet we draw out wine. In place of unrest, anxiety, and fretful care, there is changeless peace and joy and love. He showed that there is no unbridged gulf between man's lowly condition and his lofty destiny; that everywhere our life, if impregnated by a pure and God-given love, grows sweet and warm and rich. Its paltry cares become noble and beautiful—its

very suffering holds the germ of joy, for through it all there breathes a principle, no longer human, but divine.

As Janet listened, her bitter feelings fell all away, like dead leaves from the forest bough. Her cup of life did not seem sweet yet, but the drop of poison had been taken out. She thought she could drink it now without such a terrible shudder.

But meanwhile the Canon's sermon was ended. His tones of familiar earnestness were changed to those of awful reverence. He was speaking now, not to men, but to God.

"Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that some gleams of the brightness of eternity may fall on these dull and earthly lives of ours, that we, seeing the glory, though it be but dim, may not fear to bring gladly our every act a sacrifice to thee. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen."

And then the great organ pealed out a tumultuous voluntary. There was a swaying to and fro among the crowd. Many of the people were streaming out

through the open doorway, others were promenading leisurely up and down the long aisles, some stood by the gates of the choir, chatting together in an under tone, criticizing the music, the Canon's sermon, the effect produced by the new mode of lighting the nave, exchanging greetings with the cathedral dignitaries as one by one, divested of their canonicals, they emerged through the gates of the side aisle that led from the vestry, and, joining their friends, went home to dinner. Here and there was one, evidently a stranger, curiously examining the fretted tracery of the organ-screen, or gazing up at the carved bosses on the groined roof of the transepts. At last, with one or two long reverberating chords, the organ ceased, the mighty waves of sound roared along for a moment beneath the lofty arches, then slowly subsided and eddied into silence. The blazing capitals of the clustered columns flashed into darkness, and in an instant the roof was one vast vault of sculptured shadow, with only here and there a solitary lamp left glimmering through the gloom. The crowd were all dispersed, yet still Janet lingered. She

was waiting for the Canon's coming out. She must speak to him; she must hold once more in hers the hand of a friend; and besides, she wanted to ask him about Alison. Was she in Bedesby? Would she not come to see her in her loneliness? She waited until the last lingering straggler had departed; the vast shadowy building was empty now, except one or two vergers who were waiting to close the doors. Surely she could not have missed him. No, there he was, coming through the iron gates of the choir aisle; but the Dean was with him. They were talking earnestly together, and Janet stamped her foot with impatient disappointment on the stone pavement, as she thought that after all, she might have to go away without speaking to him. She watched them anxiously. The next moment they had shaken hands and parted. One of the vergers was bowing the Dean out of the great south door; the Canon was coming past her. How well she knew the grey head, the large stooping figure! He would have gone by without perceiving her as she stood half-hidden in the shadow of one of the pillars, had

not Janet touched his arm as he passed; her heart was beating too thick and fast just then to let her speak. He turned with a pause of surprise, uncertain at first who it could be that had thus accosted him; for Janet was changed, strangely changed, within the last few months. The freshness and roundness had returned to her cheek, it is true; the life had been too strong within her for the fever to have left any abiding traces there; but the young face, though fair as ever, had lost its girlishness, and wifehood and womanhood had fixed their indefinable impress in its stead. Her dress was different, too, and dress, as every one knows, makes such a wonderful alteration in the appearance of a woman. There was a purple sheen about her now, a soft lustrous glimmer in the rich, yet unobtrusive attire, which puzzled the Canon, who remembered only the village girl in her simple muslin and plain straw hat as she sat, Sunday by Sunday, in the pew at Marton church. It was but for an instant, though, and with a sudden look of recognition lighting up his countenance, he put his hand into hers.

"Why, Janet, you here and alone; I hardly knew you again; but I thought you had been ill. Alison was talking of calling to inquire after you. We only got here last week."

"Ah, yes, I have been ill, but that is a long time ago," said Janet, speaking rapidly, in a veiled, far-off tone; and then, clasping the warm kind hand in both her own, she exclaimed, in just her old impulsive way, "I am so glad to see you; it is so lonely here."

The Canon cast a keen momentary glance on the weary young face before him. In the dim light he could not see it very distinctly through the veil that was tied down closely over it, but he felt the little cold gloved hands trembling nervously around his own, and heard the unconscious weariness that sighed through those last words of hers. Janet did not mean it; but she had told her secret, and there was a shade of sadness in his next inquiry, simple as it was.

"And where is it you live now? I must come and see you."

"In the Abbey Close," answered Janet—"the house with the steps. Come soon, will you?"

she added, looking up with a pleading face, "and tell Alison to come too. It is such a long time since I have seen her."

"I will, child, I will," said the Canon; and with a kindly pressure of her hand, and a look that fell upon her like the shadow of a palm-tree in the desert, he said farewell, and went out at the little side-door that opened on the path to the residence. And then Janet, gathering her shawl closely round her, crossed the dim aisle to the great south entrance, where one of the vergers, a tall spare man with a black gown that fell round him like a flag around its staff, held open the door for her to pass through, making at the same time a bow nicely proportioned to the degree of deference proper to be accorded to a lady so handsomely dressed, and who seemed to be on terms of such easy intercourse with a Canon Residentiary.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE NEW LIFE.

THE Canon kept his promise. He did come the next day, and Alison with him, who, when she looked into Janet's tale-telling face, and noted her dreary surroundings, insisted on taking her back with them to the Residence to lunch.

Janet made some faint attempts to decline the proffered kindness. She saw that Mrs. Clyde appeared unwilling for her to accept the invitation, and, coward that she was, felt half afraid herself to meet Alison's soft questioning eyes. She shrank from betraying to even this gentle friend her bitter, unavailing regret for the step she had so heedlessly taken.

But Alison, gentle as she was, could be

decided when she pleased. She saw that Janet was just pining for want of a little wholesome fresh air in her life, and she was determined that she should have it. She carried her point, therefore, and not only kept her the whole day, but made her promise often to repeat her visit while they both of them remained in Bedesby.

After that first visit, seldom a day passed that Janet's quiet, unsunned life was not brightened by some little deed of thoughtful kindness from the good Canon or his daughter. Little things, doubtless, many of them, yet enough to make her feel that she was no longer living unfriended and alone; and in the sunshine of this welcome influence she began once more to feel her downcast spirits revive, as flowers beaten down by rain lift up their drooping heads, and open out their crumpled petals to the sun. It was the beginning of better days for her; and if she could but have shut out the thought of the future, she might have grown almost content with even the grey monotony of life in her mother-in-law's household, beguiled as it was by the society of her Marton friends.

But the weeks rolled on, and each morning as she rose Janet remembered that she was one day nearer to the dreaded period of her embarkation. November crept away, and December had worn far on towards Christmas; when one morning she came down into the breakfast-room early, as her custom was, so that if there chanced to be any letters for her she might read them in peace before Mrs. Clyde made her appearance.

In this breakfast-room a perpetual dusk appeared to reign even in the brightest days of summer. It looked out into the court of the Abbey Close, and having, moreover, a northern aspect, it was seldom that a stray gleam of sunshine found its way over the high-peaked gables of the adjoining houses, through the black sashes of the tall, narrow windows.

On this morning, however, as Janet entered the sombre apartment, it looked as cheerful and sociable as it was in its nature to be; for although it was yet early, and daylight had hardly begun to struggle out of the bleak December sky, yet the fire—the only thing, by the way, in the

Abbey Close household that ignored the grim propriety pervading the rest of the establishment —was roaring out a noisy welcome, as the pine-logs that were heaped upon it hissed and sputtered in the blaze.

Janet came forward and looked eagerly, as usual, to see if any letters were lying for her at her place at table. There was one from her aunt, and another in a hand she did not recognise, addressed simply to "Mrs. Clyde."

She took it up and examined it curiously, uncertain whether it was intended for herself or for her mother-in-law. It was a foreign letter, she could see, though the post mark was too faintly impressed for her to read it. It could not be from her husband; it was not his writing; besides, they could not hear from him before the next mail at the earliest, and that would not be due until next month. She laid it aside, therefore, concluding that it was meant for Mrs. Clyde; and taking her aunt's letter, sat down on a low hassock beside the fender, and read it by the blazing light of the fire.

It contained intelligence that made the light

sparkle in Janet's eyes. Miss Mildred said that they had decided on returning home in the course of a week. Mr. Brande had so nearly lost all traces of his complaint, that they thought it unnecessary to remain longer. Besides, he was impatient to see his daughter; and Miss Mildred concluded by urging her to come to them immediately on their return, and remain at the Priory House until she received instructions respecting her voyage from Mr. Clyde.

She read it through more than once; then folding it up, began to consider the prospect it had opened out before her. A quiet light welled up into her eyes as she sat with the warm firelight playing over her face, thinking how pleasant it would be to spend her Christmas in the old home of her childhood, to see once more the familiar faces which already absence had made so dear, and to know that each thought, and look, and word of those around her would be steeped in the sweet spirit of a kindly love.

Her father's absent moods, her aunt's superfluous criticism, the still monotony of the little household, all that in former days had been suffi-

cient to cloud her life, was forgotten now. She saw everything through a golden haze, which made home appear a paradise of bliss, where nothing that could sadden or disturb might find leave to enter.

But, by-and-bye, her thoughts leaped their low boundary walls, and the prospect of that long, lonely voyage, and the worse than lonely life that lay beyond, came like a blast of cold, keen air, sweeping away all her sunny visions. She felt herself shrinking more fearfully than ever from the renewal of the grinding misery of those first few weeks of married life; yet, dreading it as she did, she felt within her, something stronger still, which resolved her to encounter all that lay before her, and to accept her condition as it was, rather than by vainly struggling against her fate, to expose to others the secret sore which was such an incessant source of pain.

Never, by word or hint, had she revealed to any one the truth that her marriage with Brian Clyde had been such a terrible and irretrievable mistake. Others might suspect the fact, but

she herself kept a brave face before the world. Alison Birney, with the intuitive perception of an intense and sympathetic nature, had divined at once the canker in her life; but even she never ventured by so much as a tender look or veiled allusion to betray her knowledge of the secret so jealously preserved.

Janet was still seated, crouched down by the fire, the light all faded out of her face, brooding over her uneasy thoughts, when Mrs. Clyde entered the room in the stiff grey wrapper she usually wore in a morning, and seeing the unopened letter lying on the table, took it up, and examined the direction.

"It is for you, I believe," said Janet, rising instinctively from her low seat on the hearth-rug. Mrs. Clyde had, on more than one occasion, hinted her dislike to the childish habit Janet had of sitting almost on the ground, so unsuitable to her matronly position. She went towards the window, and stood a good while looking out through the frosted panes into the Close, watching the baker's man making his rounds with his great covered basket, filled with hot rolls. At

last, feeling chill away from the fire after being close to it so long, she turned, wondering that Mrs. Clyde, who usually had breakfast as soon as she came down, had not rung the bell to order it in.

What was the matter? There she sat, upright and motionless in her chair, her face grey and rigid, her eyes fastened with a glazed stare on the letter, which she held tightly clutched in her fingers.

Janet's first thought was that she had been seized with a fit, and she was hastening to summon assistance, when Mrs. Clyde rose slowly from her seat.

"Read it," she ejaculated, in a husky, unnatural voice, pushing the letter into Janet's hand.

"What is it?" she exclaimed, with a creeping fear of some impending ill. "What has happened?"

But Mrs. Clyde had left the room, and Janet, sinking down in the chair she had left, began hurriedly to seek in the letter the explanation of the sudden shock which its perusal had apparently produced.

A low cry of wonder, pain, and infinite relief. Her husband was dead. She was her own once more—her own, body and soul; released once and for all from those terrible bonds. And yet—and yet—dared she rejoice in her freedom, knowing that it had been purchased at such a price?

She shuddered as if the thought were guilt. All the vague, unformed imaginations of this possible event that had ever crept stealthily into her mind, came back now as if they alone had wrought out their own fulfilment. Then again, as if all were but a dream, she roused herself to consider what these unlooked-for tidings really meant. She read the letter through a second time from beginning to end. It had been posted at some port where the vessel in which her husband was sailing had touched, and concisely conveyed the intelligence that a few days previously he had been seized with cholera, and after a short illness had died and been buried at sea.

It was all true, then—true; and then, across the tumult of mingled thankfulness and awe, there fell a strange sense of rest in her thoughts

towards him who had so greatly marred her life. A few moments before, and she had been so tossed and troubled by her angry feelings. Now Death, the great smoother of grievances, had passed his cold hand across that seething sea of human strife and passion, and stilled its waves into an utter calm. There was no tenderness in this new emotion. He had wronged her too deeply for that; but there was quietness, there was peace. For he whom she had so greatly feared was dead, and to the dead all things may be forgiven.

"Will you please to have breakfast, ma'am?" said Mitchell, tapping softly at the open door.

"Breakfast!" repeated Janet, looking up with a bewildered air, and hardly conscious for the moment whether it was morning, noon, or night. "Yes, I suppose so. Where is Mrs. Clyde? We must wait for her."

"Mrs. Clyde is in her own room, ma'am. She went up more than a hour ago, and gave orders that no one should disturb her."

Mitchell was too well trained to seem aware that something unusual must have occurred, thus

strangely to perturb her mistress, or to do more than glance with an air of apparent unconcern towards the letter which Janet still held in her hands, and which she felt sure had brought some disastrous intelligence.

The bond between mistress and maid in the Abbey Close household was one of service and wages only. Mrs. Clyde would have spurned the idea that the law of kindness applied to the treatment of her own domestics, or that courtesy and consideration could possibly be due to a mere menial who was hired by the year, and could be dismissed at any time at a month's notice.

It was not very long since the baker's man, who was to have married Mitchell as soon as he should be able to keep a wife, had died in a galloping consumption, and her mistress, who knew well enough about the little romance, had sharply reproved her maid for staying up in her garret half the morning crying, instead of being downstairs about her work. The hot rolls came round all the same, but Mitchell never took them without a sigh for the dead sweetheart, and

a bitter grudge against the mistress, who had forgotten that her servant also was a woman like herself. No wonder if, as the girl stood there, demure and tidy, with her hand upon the knob of the door, waiting for Janet's orders, she felt an inward satisfaction at the thought that possibly things were being made straight at last, and that "missis was, maybe, feeling just as bad, shut up in her room, as she had done herself when Thomas, poor lad, was took, and she couldn't get leave so much as to fret a bit over it."

Ten minutes later, Mitchell was telling the news with closed doors to the conclave in the kitchen.

"She was standing over the fire, with her back turned, was Mrs. Brian, and there was the letter lying open just as she'd left it on the breakfast-table. So I just clattered a bit with the spoons an' things as I was setting them, so as she mightn't think I was up to anything, and I give a look at it. It was very near as good as print to read was the writing, and it said as Mr. Brian had been took ill with something, I

couldn't just make it out; however, he had died three days after, and that was all I saw, for the next was over the leaf. I thought she looked as if summut had scared her awful, did the Missis when I see her going upstairs. I can't say, though, myself, but what I think it's a judgment upon her. Them as hasn't feelings for others is sure to be made to feel theirselves. I allays said as it would come home to her some time. Folks must get as they give, whether they're rich or poor," said Mitchell, with an implacable remembrance of her own day of darkness.

"It 'll be a gown an' bonnet apiece, I lay," said the cook. "She's like to give us wer black handsome, seeing he was all she had. I know the last place I were in, there was one o' the childer died, an' what I got stood me in to two pound very near, what with one thing and what with another; not as I reckoned much of it then, though, for if ever there was a little angel in this world it was that child. An' how his mother did take on, to be sure; I clean pitied for her, I did."

"There isn't a many that 'll take on much for Mr. Brian, I reckon. She'll have to do it all

herself, will t' Missis," grunted old Jenkins, who had stood warming himself with his back to the fire during Mitchell's recital, and now turned round and reversed the process. "He'll do as much good out o' the world as in it, *I* think, an' not a deal neither."

"Well, I'd never anything agen him, for my part," said the cook, "though they do say he'd a deal o' ways as he hadn't ought to have. He wasn't mean, at any rate, an' he was a vast easier to please with his dinner when he was at home than the Missis is herself. I allays said, considering he *was* a gentleman, and naturally thought a deal about his eating—they all do—he was as little trouble in that way as any one I ever had to do with. There was old Dr. Boulton as I lived with once, I do believe that man used to lie awake at nights thinking of nothing in the world but what he'd have for his dinner next day; an' such tantrums as he'd get into if all wasn't just to his liking. I declare them dinners of his lay as heavy on me afore he'd eat 'em as they did on him after. Now Mr. Clyde wasn't given to that."

"Better if he had been. It might have kept him from what was worse," growled Jenkins, who was less leniently disposed towards his master's faults than the more lax and easy cook. "There was that daughter of old Armstrong's as lived in the College yard, as nice a young girl as ever was, if she hadn't been over-much taken up with her good looks, more pity for her. An' where is she now? Why, I see her last night going down the streets with her face painted up, an' her silk gown all trailing in the mud. Don't tell me as a man hadn't better grumble over his dinner as make a piece o' work like that."

It was a long speech for Jenkins to make; and the cook, who felt, perhaps, that the subject was not exactly adapted for general discussion, adroitly struck into another track.

"I wonder whether Mrs. Brian will be stopping now her husband's dead."

"Not she!" exclaimed Mitchell, scornfully, "leastways she'll be to blame if she does, I know, with a home of her own to go back to. I lay she rues she ever left it. She's had a deal to put up with since she did, what with t' Missis

an' what with him, though she never lets on about it. I allays said she hadn't sperrit enough for Mrs. Clyde. She'd have got on a deal better if she'd held herself a bit stiffer instead of going about as limp as a half-stuffed bolster. There's the Missis' bell. She'll be wanting her breakfast upstairs I lay, an' a tray to set, an' everything, just as if she couldn't have got it when she came downstairs."

Mitchell was right. Mrs. Clyde had rung for her breakfast, though it came down again almost untouched, and at four o'clock she rang again, and had a glass of wine and a biscuit brought up to her; but what she did all the long day, sitting without a fire in her chamber while the sleet drove wildly against the window, no one ever knew.

"She didn't look as if she'd been crying," Mitchell said, when she came back again into the kitchen, and closed the shutters and stirred the fire into a dancing blaze. "But laws," she added, "you might as well expect to see them stone bogies over the Close gateway start crying as her."

"Some folks takes on one way and some another," said the cook; "but they do say things is a deal easier to bear if you can fret well over 'em. I lay she's having a awful time up yonder with herself; however, she'll do with a bit o' taking down. She's been getting past bearing since Mr. Brian left, she's been so snappy. It's a pity it's a good place, for there's no pleasure in serving her. I will say that for her, she isn't near, though she's as sour as a crab; but I'd give warning to-morrow, and gladly, if I thought I'd a chance of getting as good wage anywhere else."

Next morning Mrs. Clyde came downstairs at the usual time, and took her seat in her grey wrapper at the breakfast-table opposite to Janet —the childless mother and the new-made widow together. Neither made any allusion to the one thing which each knew was uppermost in the thoughts of the other, though Janet sought uneasily for something to say which might show that she was not quite insensible to the blow which had fallen so heavily on the miserable mother; for there was no mistaking the crushed

expression on the colourless face, the twitching of the blanched lips, in the pitiful attempt to preserve composure. They witnessed more surely than tears and laments to the sharpness of her grief.

It was strange, Janet thought, that even his mother could sorrow thus for Brian Clyde; strange, perhaps, to her, not so to those who have looked longer and more deeply into the mysterious workings of the human heart, and seen how often love, in all its truth and strength, exists where there seems to be nothing for it to feed upon. Most like those curious exotics, which thrive apparently on air, and clinging to a bit of dead, dry wood, expand their brilliant blossoms as freely as if their roots were nourished by the juices of the soil.

God help us, if in this world, perfection only were to be the price of love! Who amongst us, looking at our own maimed, distorted lives, could hold out clean hands, and confidently claim it for our own? It falls we know not how, freely, unconsciously, as sunlight falls, on all, the stained as well as the pure, even as that Divine love

which, if it never shone upon defects, would shine on none of us.

This attachment to her son was the one passion of Mrs. Clyde's life, which not all his defiant indifference to herself had been able to extinguish; and Janet, though unable to comprehend it, could not resist the feeling of pity which the sight of such distress occasioned. Yet anxious as she was to say some word of condolence, she found it impossible to break through the barrier of reserve behind which Mrs. Clyde had entrenched herself.

As soon as breakfast was over, Mrs. Clyde sat down to her writing-table, and with the same unmoved, deliberate air, proceeded to make the various arrangements which the intelligence of her son's death had rendered necessary. She wrote to her solicitor, to her dress-maker, to different connexions of the family; and then turning to Janet, inquired whether she had decided on her future plans.

"I shall go home," answered Janet. Somehow, there seemed nothing else to say, and Mrs. Clyde turned back at once to her writing, as

though to preclude any attempt at further conversation.

It was a confused and comfortless week that ensued. There was much business to be transacted: letters to write, people to see, and those multitudinous duties to be attended to which a death in a family always involves. There was mourning to make, and all the sombre paraphernalia of a widow's wardrobe to be prepared. Janet made no show of a woe she did not feel; but she would not wound the feelings of others, or draw aside the decent veil which she had folded over her loveless marriage, by withholding the customary tribute of respect to the memory of the dead.

Alison Birney and the Canon came on hearing of the event which had befallen her. They spoke quietly and seriously of her altered circumstances, though they forebore to condole with her on what they knew too surely was not felt as a calamity. They were true friends, and would willingly have taken her to spend the few remaining days of her residence at Bedesby with them, assuring her that she should be as quiet as she pleased. But this Janet steadily refused; for

though Mrs. Clyde had never accorded her a daughter's place, yet she was anxious to stay with her now if by any means she might soothe somewhat the desolation of bereavement.

She felt with sorrowful compunction that if she herself had been hardly dealt with, she had not been altogether free from blame in her own conduct to her morose mother-in-law. But it was all in vain; she might as well have tried to warm an iceberg as reach the heart of Mrs. Clyde. And though, when the carriage drove up which was to convey her back to Marton, and Mrs. Clyde, with frigid composure, was bidding her farewell, Janet threw her arms around the tall, stiff form, and kissed the thin, straight lips, no answering pressure told her that she had called forth one thrill of kindly feeling in return. Poor woman! her heart was dead within her, and she had not yet learned, perhaps she never would, the one great lesson which we are all so slow, alas! to acquire, of living in the lives of others; and so, when the springs of her own joy were all dried up, finding, if not happiness, yet content, in the patient ministry of love.

Thus, within four months of the day on which

she had left the Priory House to become a bride, Janet came back to it a widow. Once more she was safely anchored in the quiet waters of home; and now, indeed, she began to feel the blessedness of peace. That evening, when first she came home, seemed like an entrance on a new life. She drew down the carriage windows as she neared the house, and looked forth eagerly, as one by one, in the clear December starlight, she recognised the familiar objects on the road. Was it true, or was it all a dream, that she had been so long away, and now was coming to them safe again? There were the lights from the mullioned windows gleaming ruddily through the trees; there was Hannah standing in the open doorway; there was her aunt, and her father behind; there was Rollo, leaping forward in tumultuous joy.

Ah! what warm greetings, as she sprang down the carriage steps; what close pressure of straining arms; and yet, mingled with these, was the veiled sympathy which Janet felt so hard to bear. It seemed almost a falsehood to be receiving it, even to be wearing the mourning garments which

were the sign of grief, when, in truth, they were to her only the symbols of release.

Miss Mildred looked at her unclouded brow, and wondered that her widowhood should sit so lightly on her. But she made no remark, only drew her into the bright fire-lit dining-room, where the table was spread ready for their old-fashioned six o'clock tea, and began to undo the fastenings of her cloak. It was strange, Janet thought, how different Aunt Mildred was from what she used to be in those old days when she scolded her from morning to night. And her father too, how kind he looked as his eye followed her about the room! She did not know that half the change was in herself, and that it was their separation which had made them feel now how close was the tie of kinship by which they were united. It seemed to her, as she sat down by the blazing fire, that there was a welcome in every tone and look. Surely it was worth a long experience of loneliness to feel herself once more in the warm heart of home.

Then the quiet rest in the still chamber, and the morning waking to find herself at home—at

home, no longer a stranger dwelling uneasily in a stranger's house. She opened her eyes and gazed round the old familiar room, with a great thankfulness swelling at her heart. There was her crape dress, the symbol of her widowhood, hanging inside the open wardrobe. She must wear that for awhile; but her brief married life, with all its trouble, and distress, and cruel corroding thoughts, was laid aside as a cast-off garment, never to be put on again. Laid aside, but not forgotten. None of us may afford to *forget* any part of our life, however bitter the remembrance of it may be.

And Janet, as she looked on her own part in those past months, felt that she could but go softly at the thought, and humbly, patiently, and lovingly walk henceforth in those old paths which once she had so despised.

The dead outer husk of her old life was falling from her now. Old thoughts were being put aside, old interests fading away, old dreams giving place to more serious realities. She was awaking into the clear morning light of Trust and Duty, looking thoughtfully around on the work to which

the day of life was calling her. And if there was no longer the quick, glad, upspringing of the heart to meet the coming hours, there was instead the deeper current of the soul's steady purpose.

It was with a feeling almost of reverence that she went forth from her chamber, on that first morning in the old home which once more was hers, to meet the life of another day, the beginning of a fresh period in her existence. With set purpose she must address herself now to the task that lay before her, of performing wisely and well the simple duties which again were given her to do. Not despising them because they were so small, but receiving them as what in truth they were, the material from which she might construct a noble, true, and God-honouring character, the appointed means by which she was to be strengthened and prepared for that larger life which, when she had exhausted all the possibilities of her present position, would assuredly be hers.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE LORD OF THE MANOR.

IF the life of a household, like that of a nation, may be said to be the happiest when there is the least to be recorded, then must that of the family at the Priory House have been supremely blest during the four years which followed this home-coming of Janet's.

Two events only, worthy of being specially chronicled, occurred. The first was the removal of Miss Mildred to a house of her own at Bedesby. She had always felt Marton dull, she said, and the Priory House being so far from the village made it still more so, especially as she was not so young as she used to be, and began to feel the fatigue of the long walk through the wood more

than formerly. Besides, now that Janet was able to take the management of the house, there was no absolute necessity for her to remain. Perhaps, too, she was secretly moved by the consideration that Mr. Brande would naturally wish his daughter to take some part in the domestic government, and preferred rather to reign in a house of her own, than to share a divided authority in that of her brother.

At all events, three months after Janet's return, she was snugly settled at Bedesby, in a little old-fashioned house in the square, just opposite the south entrance of the cathedral. Such a delightful situation, as Miss Gale said, the very thing for a lady with nothing particular to do: for of course everybody who came to Bedesby went to the Minster, and she would be able to see from her sitting-room window all that was going on, without even taking the trouble of putting on her bonnet.

The other noteworthy event was the marriage of Bessie, the little maid, who had grown up to comely womanhood now, and had bestowed herself upon Ralph Dalby, a steady young fellow who

had succeeded to the place left vacant by the death of poor Job Travis, whose passion for drink having dragged him farther and farther on the downward course, at last had pushed him out of life through that dreary means of exit, a deathbed in the Bedesby workhouse.

Janet gave the wedding-dress and wedding-breakfast, and added to the bride's little store of coarse sheets and towelling, some of the fine-spun napery from the great chest on the landing. The breakfast was served in the summer-kitchen of the Priory House, and was so bountifully provided and so beautifully decorated by Janet's tasteful fingers, as quite to overpower the bashful Bessie, who could not at all compose herself to sitting still to be waited on, but jumped up half-a-dozen times in the course of the repast, and declared afterwards to Hannah that "she should have felt a deal comfortabler to have taken off her gown when she came from church, and just gone about her work as she was used to do."

When the "good-byes" were said and the party had dispersed, the little household settled down again, with a new maid in the place of

Bessie, into its old quiet ways, and another year slipped silently away, and then an event occurred which stirred every tongue in Marton, and set all its inhabitants on the tiptoe of expectation.

The old squire died, and his nephew, Mr. Leonard Holdych, came into possession of the estate.

No one felt much regret at the news, except perhaps Mr. Wimsley the agent, who had had the management of affairs pretty much in his own hands of late, and did not particularly relish the probability of having to relinquish in part his profitable employment. Mrs. Grant especially rejoiced at the prospect of the deserted Hall being tenanted again, and Marget, who had cherished, as only women do, the remembrance of the child whom she had tossed and dandled out of feeble infancy into sturdy boyhood, thought joyfully that now at last she should once more behold her former nursling.

"He was gey fond of his nurse," said she to Mrs. Grant, one evening when she had stepped over to the Hall to have a chat with the old lady about the event which had so much interest for

them both. "He was gey fond of his nursie, puir bairn, though I needna ca' hin a bairn the noo and him thirty past. But it's like as with our little Easie, she's aye keepit a bairn to her father an' me, though she'd have been a woman grown if she'd lived."

It was not, however, until some little time after the old squire's death had caused such commotion in the village, that the new owner came down to the Hall, and then he arrived quite suddenly one Saturday afternoon, in a hired conveyance which had driven him over from Bedesby.

Mrs. Grant had received word only that morning that she might expect him in the course of the day, and a pretty stir of preparation it was that followed on the advent of the news, upstairs and downstairs in the long-deserted chambers of the old Hall. It is true that everything was in apple-pie order to begin with, for Mrs. Grant had had her spring cleaning unusually early this year, and every nook and corner throughout the house had been thoroughly visited by scrubbing-brush and duster; the old carved furniture polished up to the last degree of brightness; carpets and

hangings carried out and belaboured with furious blows as they lay, under a cloud of ancient dust, upon the greensward in the paddock behind the kitchen garden. Everything, in short, had been diligently freshened up, as far as the fading process which had been going on for nearly thirty years would permit, for this year Mrs. Grant had carried on her operations with treble zeal in the prospect that the unused rooms would be inhabited at last.

The cooking of the dinner, therefore, which was to be ready at five o'clock, was the business to which now Mrs. Grant most anxiously directed her attention, and a serious affair it was, too, for the good lady felt, as she expressed it, "that with having no one to do for, for so many years, her hand had got completely out."

Still, by dint of giving her mind to it, she managed to succeed, with the assistance of the cook at the Marton Arms, to her own satisfaction, and as the important hour drew near, awaited with a flutter of expectancy, but not of uneasiness, the long looked-for arrival.

At length a rumbling of wheels over the draw-

bridge announced the near approach of the new master of Marton Hall; and Mrs. Grant, feeling inwardly as much trepidation as her placid nature would permit, set open the great Hall door and stood by it, trim and erect, in her black silk gown and neat quilled cap, prepared to give the welcome which there was no one else to bestow.

But the tall, grave-looking man who got out of the dingy carriage was so different from what she had pictured to herself, that her little speech died upon her lips. He waited at the foot of the great flight of steps till the driver had lifted down his portmanteau and carried it up into the house; then he paid him his fare and walked in with the most easy, indifferent air in the world.

"Surely," thought Mrs. Grant, "this cannot be the little curly-headed boy that I lifted up into the carriage by his uncle's side that morning nearly thirty years ago. How time has changed him, to be sure!"

She whisked away a tear which was glistening behind her spectacles, and bidding Alice carry the portmanteau upstairs, with a low courtesy

offered to show him his room. She went up the broad staircase, her master following her, and led the way into the Oriel room. For a moment she lingered at the door.

"There is everything you want, sir, I think," said she, looking round. "Will you please to ring if there is anything else? The dinner will be ready whenever you wish."

"Very well, Mrs. Grant, that will do; you can serve it at once," said Mr. Holdych; and the old lady closed the door very quietly and went downstairs. The hour she had been looking for so long had come at last. Once more Marton Hall held its master, but somehow she was afraid the reality was not going to be all that she had expected. The mist of joyful excitement which had dimmed her eyes as she had stood at first at the door to welcome him subsided into a sigh of disappointment as she went back to her own region of the house to give directions about the serving of the dinner on the preparation of which she had bestowed such thought and pains.

As the great clock struck five she went again to her master's room to announce that dinner

was served, and, with a little flutter at her heart, ushered him through the ponderous double doors into the dining-room.

Any one who had seen this room twelve months ago would have wondered how Mrs. Grant had managed to give such an air of home-like comfort to the vast unused apartment; one might have supposed that for years it had been the centre of household life. The tapestried carpet, which had hitherto lain rolled up in the corner of the room, was spread out now soft and gay beneath the feet. The naked windows were draped with long, full hangings of crimson cloth, embroidered thick with gold, that lay in heavy folds upon the ground; the chairs and couches had been stripped of their holland pinafores, and the huge baize removed in which the great bronze chandelier had been for more than a quarter of a century encased.

The fireplace, usually a black yawning chasm, was now flinging forth a ruddy glow that gleamed pleasantly on the damask tablecloth, and flashed brightly back from the dark polished furniture, from the gilded frames of the pictures which lined

the walls, and the great mirror that hung on the opposite side in the broad space between the two stone-mullioned windows.

There is nothing like a bright blazing fire to make a room look cheerful and inviting. It smiles upon you as you enter, like the kind face of a friend. This one seemed fairly laughing to itself in uproarious glee at the bare idea of being allowed to burn for any other purpose than just to air the room, and sparkled and crackled, and darted its long tongues of flame hither and thither as if in a perfect ecstacy of delight, fairly shaming the afternoon sunlight which was coming softly in through the diamond panes of the west window at the end of the room.

No wonder that Mr. Holdych felt unconsciously the pleasant influences by which he was surrounded, and tired and hungry as he was after his long day's journey—for he had been travelling since early morning—sat down now, prepared to appreciate the creature-comforts which Mrs. Grant had provided for him.

It makes an astonishing difference in the condition of the inner man when the claims of the

outer man are attended to with due consideration. One reason, no doubt, why Diogenes snapped and snarled so at his visitors was, that there was no accommodation for dining comfortably in his tub. Leonard Holdych was no Diogenes, as we shall find out by-and-by; still, by the time that Alice had cleared the table and set the wine before him, he felt on decidedly better terms with himself and with things in general than when Mrs. Grant saw him at first, getting out of the hack carriage which had brought him from Bedesby.

Now that he was rested and refreshed, however, he was not disposed to sit long sipping his wine while his new domain lay still unexplored. He rose from table and walked to the west window, where he stood for some moments looking out on the undulating expanse of shrubbery, lawn, and wooded park that stretched before him. Turning away, his eye was arrested by a picture which hung on the wall over the door, one that, being behind him, he had not noticed as he sat at dinner.

It was a portrait of a young, dazzlingly beautiful woman. She was lightly attired in a flowing

robe and scarf of white muslin, which lay like a snowdrift across the finely-moulded bust. One hand was uplifted as if in merry menace to some person unseen; the full red lips were pressed closely together, and a mischievous light was sparkling in the laughing eyes, blue and bright as summer skies —a fair young face, brimming with fun and gaiety, so arch and bewitching that Leonard might well bestow upon it more than a passing glance.

But it was something other than its mirthful beauty which arrested his attention. He stood looking at it as one looks into the face of a stranger who suddenly accosts us in familiar mood. Surely those eyes had looked out on him before now from some living face. He had seen that golden head before, though where or when he was unable to divine. His thoughts wearied themselves in their vexatious search after something which perpetually eluded their endeavour. Suddenly an idea flashed across his mind that for the moment darkened his brow as he gazed yet more intently into the sunny face.

But no, it could not be, for, from the appear-

ance of the picture, the original of this portrait must now be a person somewhat advanced in years. Provoked with himself, yet unable to repress his curiosity, he rang the bell, and desired Alice to send the housekeeper to him.

"Mrs. Grant," said he, as the old lady entered the room, "I must trouble you to act as my cicerone over the Hall. I must not remain a stranger in it longer than I can help."

Mrs. Grant's trim little face brightened up as she replied by a formal little courtesy. What a cicerone might be she did not exactly know, but she gathered that her master wished to be shown over the Hall; and nothing could have gratified her more than the opportunity of conducting him in person through the house over which so long she had reigned the solitary mistress.

"These are family portraits, I suppose?" said Mr. Holdych, whose eyes had again wandered towards the golden beauty.

"Yes, sir; that over the fireplace is Mr. Geoffrey, your uncle," said the housekeeper, pointing to the portrait of a young man apparently about thirty years of age. There was a

quiet nobility about the face not unlike the expression in Leonard's own; but looking closely into it, a keen observer might detect the evidences of contending elements which met and mingled there. The drooping eyelid, and full, lax lips, the delicately cut nostril, and small, but finely-moulded chin, betokened a nature at once sensuous and refined, passionate and sensitive, weak, yet persistent.

Leonard looked closely at it; there was not much here to remind him of the withered, paralysed old man whom he had known as such for the past dozen years or more.

"And that's his lady beside him," continued the housekeeper, with a sigh, which Leonard did not perceive. He had turned again to the portrait at the end of the room, of the golden-haired beauty.

The housekeeper followed his glance.

"It's a beautiful face," said she. "People used always to be a great deal taken up with it. She must have been a most lovely lady, if she didn't belie her picture."

Again the eager, searching look in her master's eye.

"Who was she?" he inquired, in a tone in which carelessness and interest were strangely blended.

But his curiosity was destined to remain unsatisfied. Mrs. Grant could give him no information except that the portrait was not one of any member of the family. Her master had bought it at a sale in Edinburgh—some gentleman who had failed; and this lady, she believed, was his wife." He set great store by it, did the master," she added, "though I can't say but I always thought, for my part, that the portrait of Mrs. Holdych herself was by far the sweetest of the two."

And indeed it was a lovely countenance, full of sweet, quiet tenderness, that contrasted strangely with the half-mocking glee of the one from which Leonard now turned away, to examine more attentively the pale, pure face of the once neglected wife, whose untimely, long-lamented death it was that had retained for him the inheritance of Marton Hall. A graceful, twilight face, not without a shade of patient sadness in the lines of the mouth, though the dark, soft eyes seemed

lustrous with the gentle light of love. It must have been a sweet soul that had looked through those loving eyes. Leonard almost fancied, as he gazed upon the portrait, that he could recall some faint traces of his childish remembrance of the original. But the memories of those early years were too faint to be more than a feeble haze of half-formed consciousness. There had been little in his later life to keep alive the few recollections he had carried with him from Marton. His uncle had gone abroad immediately on the death of his wife, transferring the little boy to the care of his mother's relatives; and though after the death of the child's parents the intercourse between the old man and his heir had been kindly, it had been too slight to admit of anything like familiarity.

"It was a sad thing for Marton when she died," said the housekeeper, after a pause. "It was a terrible thing was the fire; but it was nothing to the trouble her death made. There wasn't a dry eye to be seen the day they laid her in her grave, and many a heavy heart there was, let alone her husband's. He would have given

his own life, I believe, when it was too late, if that would have brought her back."

Leonard knew little of the incidents connected with the private history of his uncle's family, and, indeed, hitherto had hardly cared to make himself acquainted with them; but now, surrounded as he was by these mementoes of the past, he began to feel an interest unknown before in the story of the lives so long ago played out in the ancient mansion. Before he was aware, he found himself listening attentively to the reminiscences of the housekeeper, who, perceiving that she had got her master's ear, went on, well pleased, to relate more precisely the circumstances that had led to the long desertion of the Hall.

"It's seven-and-twenty years," said she, "since she died, poor lady, and it seems only like yesterday. I shall never forget that night, if I live to be a hundred years old. We saw she was just sinking away, though he wouldn't believe it. He said the doctor was mistaken; it was nothing but that she wanted to be quiet. She'd lain for more than an hour as still as though she'd been

asleep, and he was sitting by the bedside, holding her hand in his, and watching her as if he'd never lift his eyes from her face again. At last the baby began to make a sort of a moaning cry; the nurse had it on her lap by the fire. So I took it out of her arms, and carried it through into the dressing-room. I thought maybe its wailing might disturb her. I shut the door, and walked it softly up and down, to still it if I could. I had had it about ten minutes, or it might be a little more, when there was a cry that rang through all the house, such a one as I never heard before nor since. I rushed back with the child in my arms to my mistress's room; my heart misgave me what it was. It was all over, poor lady—she was gone! And there was the master standing over her with a face that looked as if it had been turned to stone. And the baby, poor little thing, didn't stay long behind. It never seemed rightly alive from the time that it was born; it just dwindled on till the day after its mother died, and then it went too. They laid it in the coffin beside her; and then, when the funeral was over, the master had the house shut

up, and no one belonging to the family has ever been near it since. He took a good many papers and things with him, and all her trinkets and books, but everything else he left orders was to be kept just as they were left. The desks and drawers were all sealed up as you see them. I don't know what is in them, but they have never been opened since. Mr. Wimsley—that's the agent here at Marton—comes now and again to see over the place, but nothing has ever been disturbed; and I have always been particular myself to keep everything just as it used to be. I thought for a good while maybe the master might like to come some time, just to go through the place, even if he didn't settle down again to live in it. But he never did; he wasn't even brought here to be buried."

Leonard listened in silence to the old lady's narration, and then followed her as she conducted him through the various apartments of the Hall, pointing out here and there a suit of rusty armour, which centuries ago had enclosed the form of some stalwart ancestor of his; here a casket of curiously carved ivory, or an ancient bronze, or

inlaid cabinet of rare workmanship, all of which had some story of their own belonging to them.

At last they came to a door at the farther end of a long corridor. Mrs. Grant opened it, and then stood aside to let her master pass before her.

But this room was not, like the rest of the rooms through which she had conducted him, strange to Leonard. Slowly, as he looked around, the dim faint memories of his childish years gathered themselves into a distincter form. Surely he remembered that wide fireplace with the coloured tiles, and some one telling to him, in a soft quiet voice, the stories pictured on them. And the stained glass, too, round the window, through which the sunlight fell, making bright patches on the floor, and that great rocking-horse still standing in the corner. Yes, he had seen them all before.

It had been the nursery nearly thirty years ago, and with a curious sense of interest he looked at the childish toys that lay piled up on the shelves of a great oak cabinet with glass doors

protected by a screen of wire-work. He remembered quite well falling against it once and hurting his head. How strange! And here he was again, a man, with nearly half a lifetime lying now behind him.

"Is the girl living who came over to England with me?" he inquired. "Marget, I think her name was—a Scotch girl, was she not?"

"Oh yes, sir," replied Mrs. Grant, smiling to herself at the idea of her master speaking of the grey-haired Marget as a "girl;" "she is living in Marton still, both she and her husband, at the same place, just by the park gates. But she's getting into years, sir, now."

"Ah, I dare say. I forget, it is so long ago," said Leonard. "You have been here a long time yourself, I believe. You are the same person who was left in charge when the family removed."

"Yes, sir, five-and-thirty years I've been here altogether. I came here with Mrs. Holdych when she was a bride." And closing the door behind her master, Mrs. Grant conducted him again down the long corridor and into the hall,

where she made her courtesy and left him by himself. Leonard stood for awhile in the open doorway, and then taking his hat, he lit a cigar, and strolled out to smoke it in the sharp, clear evening air.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE KNIGHT'S TOMB.

IT was early when Leonard awoke the next morning, too early to rise, although his brain was awake and active, for the sun was not yet up, and only a few half-awakened birds were twittering out their faint uncertain notes in the grey twilight.

He lay still, therefore, idly watching the thoughts and fancies that flitted in vague procession through his mind, and enjoying that delicious laziness of brain and body in which a man feels that he may legitimately indulge, when he finds himself broad awake at an hour that renders it manifestly absurd to think of getting up as yet to the business of the day.

It was the Oriel room in which he was lying, and though Leonard knew but little of the scenes which long ago the old walls had witnessed, yet the quaint, unaccustomed aspect of the chamber, the faded richness of the brocaded hangings, the gleam of the great hanging mirror, the one or two family portraits which gazed out from their antique frames with the strangely living look belonging to old paintings, all inspired him with an unwonted sense of mystery and seclusion.

It was no new thing for Leonard Holdych to find himself in fresh quarters. His frequent and rapid journeys to and fro throughout the continent of Europe—for up to this period he had filled the post of Queen's Messenger—had brought him acquainted with many and strange resting-places, from the sumptuous apartments in ducal palaces, where, from the nature of his office he occasionally found himself a guest, down to the mean and barely furnished room of the wayside inn in some lonely and unfrequented district.

But into this room, with its dim, vague memories of his childish years—here, where perhaps his ancestors had been born and died—it seemed

as if the departed inhabitants had transfused some portion of their ancient life, their long buried hopes and fears, their human cares, and joys, and griefs; and as if some wraith of its former occupants still lingered in the dusky recesses and among the heavy folds of the sombre drapery.

This peculiar magnetic consciousness can never be experienced in its full intensity save by those who, like the new Master of Marton, are placed where the very heart of long-past generations of those from whom their own life is derived, seems still palpitating around them; who feel, as it were, coiled about them that long chain of descent of which most men see but a single link. And Leonard had, moreover, that sensitive psychical organization, that fineness of texture, mental and physical, which rarely results save from long generations of careful culture, and which renders its possessor susceptible to these subtle and half-immaterial influences.

Wise men may smile, and justly, at the brainless aristocrat who, in default of merits of his own, plumes himself on those of his ancestors. Still it is this inherent quality of which I have spoken, which does often make the pride of birth

no idle boast; and though long lineage does not of necessity impart it, yet it is more likely to be met with in the descendant of a stock of worthy sires, than in those chance-bred sons of the soil who have sprung up, no one knows how, like a crop of mushrooms in an autumn meadow.

No wonder, then, if Leonard felt himself swayed by new and indefinite emotions, in this room where the very air seemed saturated with the presence of those, whose lives, long since played out, had left his own behind. Hitherto he had seldom realized his position as being, with the exception of his uncle, whose death had just left him the head of the family, the last of his name, almost of his race; for the next heir to the Marton estate was a distant descendant of a female branch of the family. He had been living immersed in public duties, engrossed by cares which, while not exactly interests, were constantly pressing upon him with demands for instant and urgent attention. But now he had slipped off with his official position, the cares and responsibilities attaching to it, and assumed one of ease and affluence, and on this first day in his ancestral home, was turning over,

as it were, a new leaf in the history of his life. The past—blotted, scrawled, defaced, with its records of large desires and small fulfilment, of passions, hopes, and remorse, of hot blood struck into sudden frost—was laid aside, and the future, a fair unwritten page, lay spread before him. What story, he wondered to himself, would be inscribed there when it, too, should come to be laid up in the archives of memory?

At length the sounds of returning life broke in upon his meditations. The sun was pouring a flood of tinted light through the amber and purple panes of the Oriel window. The chirruping of the birds had swelled into a chorus of vociferous song; doors were clapping in distant parts of the house, and the sound of footsteps heard echoing along the corridors, as the housekeeper and her single maid went about their morning occupations.

Leonard rose and dressed. The room looked cheerful and familiar enough now in the broad daylight, and as he opened one of the casements in the window, and looked out over the sunlit park with its belt of dark woods, a pleasant

sense of ownership possessed his mind and disposed him to be on good terms with himself and all the world.

As he descended the broad staircase into the hall he was met by the old housekeeper, who had been listening for his step, and came forward now with her trim little figure, and quiet face, to inquire what time he would please to have breakfast.

"In about an hour's time, Mrs. Grant. I think I shall go round the park first, and shall not be back just yet."

Mrs. Grant made a precise little courtesy.

"Then, sir, I had better give you the key of the gates. This is it, sir," she added, as she rummaged over her bunch, and drew off a small round key of a peculiar form. "It is the same poor Mrs. Geoffrey used to carry about with her. I put it among my own when she died."

Leonard took it, and the housekeeper opened the great folding-doors to let him out, and then stood watching him as he strode across the grass-grown terrace in front of the house, and through the tall stone gateway, over the drawbridge that led to the park.

"Ay, Marton has got its master at last," said the old lady to herself, as she listened to the clear ring of his retreating steps; "if only it had a mistress, too. But aye dear! the woman had need have a good heart that ventures to take up with him. I wouldn't have those eyes of his on me my life long, no, not to be lady of Marton Hall."

It was a pleasant prospect that greeted the eye of the new owner of Marton as he stood on the rusty bridge, looking out over the broad acres which now he called his own. The neglected garden, with its rank luxuriant wilderness, lay unseen behind him; before him stretched a prairie-like expanse of billowy grass, studded over with clumps of gigantic beeches, oaks, and elms, and bounded by the dark serrated line of the fir wood that on this side girdled in the park.

The man must have been either more or less than human who could have looked, under such circumstances, on such a scene with indifference; and Leonard was neither. He stood with his hands in his pockets, feeling that now the toil of life lay behind him, and that henceforth,

with all the means and appliances of happiness within his reach, he might betake himself at leisure to its enjoyment.

But by-and-bye, pricking its way to the surface through this pleasant gratulation, there came that old sense of nameless unrest which even his new-found fortune had failed entirely to dissipate. It made him feel, that after all, there was a large margin in his life still unfilled. The inheritance which he had been waiting for so long was his at last; yet somehow he felt just now pretty much as he had done before he got it. For he was as homeless at heart as ever. In the whole wide world not one hand he cared to press within his own—not one face into which he cared to look; and with that there came before him the bright golden head, and the laughing eyes with their look of arch defiance.

And then the sunshine, that seemed all alive in the dewy wind-stirred grass, and the blithe song of the birds, and the fair landscape that lay spread before him, seemed just an impertinence, nothing more.

He shook himself, lifted his head with an

impatient gesture into the morning sunshine, and began to walk at a rapid pace along a footpath that struck across the park in the direction of the plantation. It took a bend, however, by-and-bye, and brought him up to a wooden gate, greened over with lichen, and opening into the churchyard.

A sudden thought came into his mind. He would go now into the church and look round quietly at the family monuments, before the villagers should assemble for service. He took the pass-key out of his pocket, and let himself through the wicket. Then he went round the church to a gate that opened on to the village-street. A little sun-burnt girl, with a flapping straw hat, much tattered about the brim, was going past, carrying a can of milk in her hand.

Leonard stopped her.

"Who keeps the keys of the church?" he inquired.

The child dropped a sudden courtesy, and pointed to a low yellow-washed cottage close by.

"Michael Bray, he's t' saxon," said she.

"And is that his house?" asked Leonard.

She nodded in reply, and then stood staring after him with open eyes and mouth, as he went up to the house and knocked at the door.

No one came. He knocked again; still no answer. At last he went through a gate in the yard, which seemed to lead round to the back of the house. Here he found a door partly open, through which he caught a glimpse of a kitchen with a brightly-sanded floor and a blazing fire. He pushed the door a little farther open, and knocked again on the inside more loudly than before.

This time a woman's voice answered from a room at the top of the stairs which led up out of the kitchen.

"Have you the keys of the church?" he asked.

"Ay, sir, but I isn't up; I'se bad i' bed, an' the master's down at the byre. He'll be back enow, if you can come in a bit."

"Where do you keep them? Can I get them myself?" said Leonard, unwilling to wait the man's return.

"They're in the big chest in the house-

place, sir — the top drawer o' the left-hand side."

Leonard went through the kitchen, and without much trouble found both the chest and the keys.

"Ha' ye fun 'em, sir?" asked the voice.

"All right," answered Leonard, going out of the cottage; "you shall have them again in half-an-hour."

He had some difficulty in turning the key in the rusty lock when he reached the church. At last it yielded, with a harsh grating noise, and pushing open the heavy nail-studded door, he passed out of the blithe sunshine into the mellow gloom within.

Marton church was not much in accordance with modern notions of ecclesiastical architecture. It had been built in days when rude stone halls, rush-strewn floors, and bare wooden benches, were considered sufficient accommodation for the jovial barons and stalwart retainers who had given of their substance to its erection.

It was a massive stone structure, not differing much in form and outward appearance from the

great barn which formed the central object on the steading of John Bradshaw, the principal farmer in the district. The huge black timbers of the roof gave shelter to whole colonies of industrious spiders, who had woven a fantastic drapery across every dark corner, with here and there a pendant banner of the same, that waved gracefully to and fro, as stray breezes crept in and wandered through the dusky vault.

The pews, like the pulpit, were of black oak, narrow, high, and straight, and decorated with grotesque and fanciful carvings. Towards the chancel end the blank grey spaces of the walls were broken by funeral tablets of yellowish marble, interspersed with two or three faded scutcheons—one, in fresher colours than the rest, being placed over the Hall pew, having been put up within the last few months on the death of the late Mr. Holdych.

The place would seem more cheerful, doubtless, when the tall pews were filled by their rustic occupants and the service was going on in the church; but now, as Leonard walked up the aisle, his footsteps echoing through the silence

with a strange unfamiliar sound, it had a blank and dreary look, that unconsciously oppressed him with its sense of desolation.

The only thing, which, like a smile on a homely face, redeemed the grim old sanctuary from the charge of positive ugliness, was the richness of the stained windows, through which the morning sun now poured with a tender glow, filling the empty air with slanting lines of rainbow-tinted light.

It fell, through the purple robe of a figure of the Saviour in the window over the altar, on a square flint tomb in the chancel, upon which was a recumbent figure of a knight in armour. His feet were crossed, in token that he had fought in the Holy Land. His sword was girt upon his left side beneath his blazoned shield; his mailed hands were folded palm to palm upon his breast. The inscription on this tomb had long been obliterated by the hand of time; but tradition declared that beneath it rested the bones of Miles Holdych, the founder of the family, who had won his spurs in the Holy Land; and having followed King Richard through the wars, had been re-

warded on his return by the gift of the Manor of Marton.

Leonard stood by the tomb, looking down on the battered face lying upturned with its aspect of monumental calm; and as he looked, there came over him a great sense of the vanity and incompleteness of all human life and endeavour. His own small span of years seemed crushed down beneath the weight of these long ages past; it seemed so mean and insignificant, so empty and unlighted. If even he had ever touched lofty things with his wishes, he had touched only little ones with his hands. And then, again, he looked down on the dusty, crumbling figure, and wondered where was the living conscious principle that once had lived in the dust which now lay mouldering beneath.

Six hundred years it was, since the good knight's soul had gone to its God; and day by day, as the centuries crept slowly by, had the morning sun, lifting itself above the low Wold hills, looked through the chancel windows of the little church upon the armed figure keeping its silent watch above the warrior's dust.

To Leonard, standing there in the quiet church, it seemed as though a mightier than that mailed hand had swept away the vast reach of years that lay stretched between them, and that alone there by his tomb, the spirit of this long dead ancestor touched his own.

He could not chase away the feeling; it clung to him; it presented itself again and again with increasing pertinacity. He turned away, and walked down the aisle, trying to decipher the inscriptions which the feet of many generations of worshippers had well-nigh effaced from the grave-stones that formed its pavement.

But still that shadowy presence filled the haunted solitude; and drawn by a power which he could neither explain nor resist, he retraced his steps, and stood again by the figure lying in its stony rest.

As he did so, his eyes fell upon an old hassock of tattered matting, which lay close beneath the tomb—mean enough in itself, doubtless, but now, as the sun shone upon it through the purple robe of a saint, all radiant in the amethyst light. And then from this dingy hassock a sermon

preached itself to Leonard such as he had never heard before, one which he remembered all his life long.

It figured to him his own life, which, just now, had seemed so mean and small, so empty of all glory or joy. It showed him also, that nothing is too worthless or low to receive nobility or beauty, when reflecting the brightness of that life divine, which makes all it touches glorious alike. And as he stood looking, this little seed-germ of truth sank deep into his heart, and wrought there, and like a quickening spirit, vitalized his life.

In every life which attains to the true dignity of which our God-given humanity is capable, there comes a period, call it as we will, which answers to the term "conversion." It is when a power not his own, entering into the soul of a man, causes him to feel that the span of years comprised between the cradle and the grave, is not, in truth, the whole of life; that the ties of pleasure, pain, or love, which bind him to this present material world, do not constitute the whole of his relations to the great universe of

God. Only when, consciously or unconsciously, he recognises the fact, that around this finite life of his flows a boundless ocean of infinite existence, and that in this mean and paltry mould of daily thoughts, and words, and deeds, he is fashioning an inevitable eternity, does the true meaning of life, in all its dread significance, first dawn upon him.

To Leonard, as he stood there by the old knight's tomb, was this meaning, dimly charactered as yet, beginning to disclose itself. Already the mists of indifference were being chased away, and his vision purged to behold the awfulness and sanctity of the life in the midst of which he stood.

He had lived on hitherto in a broken, fragmentary fashion. There had been no steady onward course, no resolute trampling over passion, no thread of even purpose running through his life, linking the years, like precious pearls, together. He had been struggling along a tangled path, the heavens black with clouds, the earth rough with briers; and now, as it seemed to him, he had come to the edge of the wilder-

ness, and saw a plain path opening out before him.

He looked around. He was alone. There was the battered hassock lying in the sun; the old knight locked in his stony sleep; the rainbow-tinted light still streaming over the pavement. With a strange sense of upspringing life, as though he were going forward to meet some coming joy, he passed again through the iron-bossed door, and locking it behind him, stood once more in the sunlit, green churchyard.

## CHAPTER IX.

### IN CHURCH.

THE second bell had just ceased chiming, when Leonard followed, through the low-arched doorway of the church, the little knot of villagers who had been lingering outside the porch, unwilling to put an end to their morning gossip sooner than was absolutely necessary.

Michael Bray, the old sexton, had been watching for his appearance, in a flutter of excitement at the thought of once more escorting to the Hall pew one of its rightful occupants. In his younger days, the crowning moment of Michael's Sunday glory had been that, when staff in hand, he had marched up the aisle, followed by the family from

the Hall, and then opening with a flourish the door of their pew, had stood erect and proud, while one by one, the "quality" filed in. Marton church had never seemed to Michael rightly filled since that great pew had been vacant. To him, with that remnant of feudal feeling which still lingers among the inhabitants of many rural districts, it seemed like a house with the best rooms unfurnished. It was, therefore, with a tremor of delight that he awaited the arrival of the new Lord of the Manor. He advanced from his nook by the stone font as soon as Leonard came in sight, and carrying his staff erect, as though at once to proclaim and magnify his office, marched before him as firmly as his bowed shoulders and rheumatic legs would permit, and ushered him to his place.

Leonard's entrance was the signal for a general rustle throughout the church, a straining of bonneted heads, and a turning of rugged, weather-beaten faces, together with various unruly movements on the part of sundry little boys in the high-backed pews, whose curiosity, the mothers, mindful of propriety, yet themselves equally

anxious to catch a glimpse of the new squire, with some difficulty restrained.

Meanwhile, the object of this unwonted interest walked up the aisle behind the grey-haired sexton, and took his seat with that air of easy grace, veiled by a lofty reserve and repose of manner, which everywhere distinguishes the bearing of the true-born English gentleman.

From the place where he sat, Leonard commanded a view of the whole church. Indeed, it appeared to have been designed with the express purpose of enabling the rustics to obtain, once at least in the week, a leisurely view of their temporal head. The Hall pew was the only one in the church, with the exception of those belonging to the Rectory and the Priory House, which had been constructed with any regard to the comfort of its occupants. It was almost the size of a room in a London villa. Square, with seats all round it, and a high desk in the centre, furnished with faded crimson cushions, on which were laid large leather-backed prayer books, having the Holdych arms emblazoned on the covers. These, for the last thirty years, old

Michael had duly dusted and laid in their appropriate places, locking the door carefully before service began, lest some unwary stranger should by chance stroll in and desecrate the sacred enclosure.

Leonard stood up while the Psalms were being sung by the village choir to a ponderous old chant, and gazed round with an interest that was beginning to make itself felt, upon the faces of the people, with most of whom he was associated now in a sort of feudal bond.

As his eye wandered through the church, now resting on the grotesque details of the pulpit carving, now on the angular figures in the painted windows, now on the slow, set faces in the pews before him, he suddenly caught sight of one which seemed familiar to him. It was Janet's. She was standing beside a thick, whitewashed column just beneath the chancel window, through which the sunlight was falling, wrapping her in a soft fold of tinted light. She was looking steadfastly before her, with an expression of folded quiet on her countenance, and her hands clasped loosely on the Psalm-book which lay open on the desk.

There was something in the utter repose and containment of her attitude which seemed to surround her as with an atmosphere of seclusion, setting her apart, even while she stood there among the throng of village worshippers.

Leonard could not withdraw his eyes from the quiet unconscious face. He remembered it well. It was the same, yet different from that he had seen so long ago, with the lamplight streaming on it, under the porch of the village inn. As he stood thus, the locked expression on Janet's countenance began to relax, her eyes drew in their gaze; she turned, and as she did so, met the look fixed so intently upon herself. She did not glance hastily aside, but scanned his features for an instant, as if seeking there some half-forgotten thought. Then bending over the book before her, the column came between them and she was hidden from his sight.

Leonard did not see her again during the reading of the service. He looked round several times, but always the great whitewashed pillar interposed its envious screen. At last the choir, aided by fife, bassoon, and booming violoncello,

struck up the psalm preceding the sermon, and then Leonard, looking up, saw, not as he expected, the grey head of Canon Birney, who, he knew, held still the living of Marton, but a younger man, who was looking round now upon the people with a keen, fiery glance, that seemed as if it would burn away all indifference, and compel them to listen to what he was about to utter.

But when he began to speak, there was something in his words that contrasted strangely with the iron face and ringing mighty voice. He took his lesson, as the Great Teacher was wont to do, from the common things around. It was about the spring flowers which were beginning now to laugh out in all the fields, and hedgerows, and woodland paths. He bid his hearers note how once again Nature was busily at work, guiding that mighty current of vitality ever streaming throughout the dull dead earth, forcing it into the springing germ, the bursting bud, creeping with it, down the sun-stained blossoms, into the little tomb in which the seed lay buried, and leaving there that wonderful life, which, by-and-bye, should fill the orchard boughs with fruit.

And then he told how these laws of Nature were God's way of shadowing out to our dim senses his mighty workings in the world of mind; how our life lies dead within us till quickened by his Spirit; how then it will last, will reproduce itself, will blossom and bear fruit in another and an endless world. And this mysterious new life, he showed, consisted not in outward things, in creeds, or rituals, or belief in any human teaching or observances. It was something more hidden, penetrating, vitalizing than these—the Word of God—nigh us, even in our hearts, which no man by searching may find out.

Perhaps the rustic audience did not enter very deeply into the inner meaning of what they heard. The hard-handed labourers, the buxom village girls, conscious of their Sunday ribbons, the tottering old men and tidy dames, with the sprinkling of substantial farmers and their portly wives, of whom the congregation was principally composed, lived of necessity too much in the rough outward world of sturdy toil and short, snatched-at pleasures, to have much consciousness of one inner and unseen. And yet, as a blind man feels

the sunshine, so they felt the influence of this intense and lofty life breathing itself now upon them.

Neither, perhaps, did Leonard's thoughts very closely follow the speaker's words on this, his first morning at Marton church. He was not much in the habit of listening in church. When he went, which was not often, for he was seldom at home on Sundays, and did not care to be indebted to strangers for a seat, he generally stretched out his legs in the pew when the sermon began, and considering it as a sort of parenthesis in life, filled it up with such thoughts and speculations as he would have regarded as a waste of time under any other circumstances.

To-day, however, better feelings had taken possession of his mind. He sat looking through the open casement in one of the great arched windows before him, on the rippling green foliage of the tall poplars outside the church, and on the living blue beyond, and felt as if the fresh, sweet life without were wooing him forth to share in it himself. Now and then some words of the speaker fell upon his ear, and then again all

sound became silence as he listened to the voice within.

Once, as he changed his position, his eye fell again upon Janet. She was leaning back, still robed in that purple light, her lips slightly apart, her eyes riveted upon the speaker, as though she were drawing her very life from his. This time, a feeling akin to reverence made Leonard withdraw his gaze. He wondered who she was, and whether she had remembered him as he remembered her. And then his mind went back to that twilight ride so long ago. And with that the tide of thought ebbed again, and stranded him upon the little strip of shore which formed the passing moment. He was listening to the words that were falling on his ear, and had forgotten for an instant the quiet figure in the purple light.

At last the sermon was over; there was a rustle of departure in the high-backed pews, and soon the aisle was thronged by the people streaming out of church. Michael Bray hobbled from his seat beneath the pulpit, and threw open again the door of the Hall pew, standing by it while

Leonard, who at first had hardly noticed the old man, gathered up his hat and gloves, and passed out into the aisle.

His eyes had been following Janet, who, the service over, was arranging the books in their places, and preparing to follow her father out. Leonard sat still, supposing she would pass by him down the aisle, and so allow him to obtain a nearer view of her face. Instead, however, she and her father went out by a little side door in the chancel; and then Leonard rose and followed the old sexton, who was waiting to escort him to the door.

The green churchyard was dotted over with little groups of villagers, who were exchanging their usual Sunday morning civilities. These neighbourly greetings were to the good folks of Marton as much a part of the service as the sermon itself. The village belles knew that they were looking their best. The country swains, in their rainbow neckties and Sunday suits, with huge posies in their buttonholes, felt that this was the time for any little displays of gallantry which they might be disposed to make. The

farmers' wives, too busy through the week to waste in gossip, the time demanded by their multifarious duties, felt at liberty now to indulge in a little friendly chat. If there had been a quarrel at the Bedesby market-table the day before, it was usually made up in the churchyard on Sunday morning; and little Miss Gale would have been quite at a loss throughout the week, had it not been for the stray bits of news which she picked up here, and distributed among her friends in the course of her rounds of calls.

Evidently, this morning, the subject under discussion was one of unusual interest, for though the congregation had had abundance of time to disperse, yet hardly a single figure specked the broad, smooth road which led from the churchyard down into the village.

There was a sudden lull in the general hum as the new squire came out. Every eye was turned upon him as he walked down the path, while whispered comments took the place of the animated conversation which his appearance had interrupted.

No sooner was he out of hearing than the buzz of talk began again.

"He's a gentleman," said Ben Bardon, who was relating to a knot of eager listeners an event which had befallen him the previous night.

"I see'd that as soon as ever I set eyes on him. I can tell t' make o' the right sort o' quality as well as I can tell a bit o' good wood from a poor un. He's a real gentleman, an' free spoken, too, he is."

"Why, when did *you* have a chance o' speaking to him?" said old Michael, who was just pulling the key out of the church door, and now joined the group, somewhat nettled at the air of conscious importance which Ben could not refrain from assuming.

"Me? why, last night, as I were coming from Linton, through t' planting. So, as I was a coming down to t' beck," continued he, addressing his audience in general, "there was him just coming down to t' other side, an' looking as if he was a bit taken aback. For you see that there freshet fore end o' t' week had swum away t' plank, an t' crossing were ower clarty to leap. So I see'd he was for turning back. You see gentlefolks isn't like us; they don't much

matter muckying theirselves if they can help it. So I sings out, 'Haud hard, sir.' I'd no idee, you know, who it was. An' I hugs down two or three big stones an' shoves 'em right into t' middle o' t' beck, an' says I, 'You'll get ower dryshod noo, sir.' An' wi' that he comes ower to t' other side; an' says he, 'Are you a Marton man?' 'Yes, sir,' says I, 'Ben Bardon's my name.' So, says he, 'You're a fust-rate bridge-builder,' says he; and wi' that he bids me good-night for all t' world just as if I'd been a gentleman like hisself."

"Well," said Josh Thompson, the village shoemaker—a fleshy little man with a pursy face and light, watery eyes—"an' so he'd ought. Fair words is cheap enough; an' he was beholden to ye, wasn't he?"

"Ay," said Ben; "but it was t' way he did it. He gev me a look as much as to say, you didn't do it for pay, an' I aren't going to insult you by offering of it to you. Now, there's a deal as thinks theirselves gentlefolks would ha' nipped up their faces, an' stopped a shilling into your hand, as much as to say, take that, it

isn't for the likes of us to be beholden to such as you."

"Ay," said Josh, "it's all very well a young chap like you talking o' independence, an' that, but when a man doesn't addle over a pound a week, an' has a wife an' family to keep out on't, let alone house-rent an' coals, there's no call to turn up your nose at a extra shilling now and again, if it comes in your way."

"No more there is," returned Ben; "but then I like to earn it, and not have it thrust at me as if I couldn't say a civil word to my betters without looking to get paid for it. If I do a turn o' good work, I reckon to get the vally on it; but it riles me past bearing the way some folks has o' thinking they can pay back good-will wi' their sixpences an' shillings."

"Well, well," said Josh, whose notions of honour were not quite so fine-spun as those of the young carpenter; "we shall see how he holds his hold. The proof o' the pudding 'll be in the eating. Trade's been nobbut slack at Marton this bit back. Mebby it 'll look up a bit now t' squire's here to give it a lift."

And Josh, reminded, doubtless, of the thick batter pudding which was even then browning crisply in the oven of the village bakehouse, beneath the bit of frizzling mutton destined for his Sunday dinner, moved lazily off, followed soon by the rest of the loiterers, most of whom to-day had similar attractions drawing them in the direction of home.

## CHAPTER X.

### MAY.

IT was past the middle of May, and Marton was half-buried beneath a drift of apple-blossoms—pink, and red, and white—the brown thatch of its cottage-roofs hardly peeping above the rosy wreaths. In every garden hedge-row laburnums shook down their tresses of dropping gold; and lilacs, white and purple, filled the air with fragrance. The beautiful young year had grown to womanhood now, and came laughing and blushing into the arms of summer. And in all the air there was that indescribable stir, that sense of silent, unceasing activity, which tells that a new sweet life is pulsing once again within the bosom of the earth.

Janet was sitting in the great bay window of the oak-panelled dining-room in the Priory House, the breeze coming in through its open doors, and stirring her rippling brown hair; just as when we saw her first, more than six years ago, when little Miss Gale had come to call. The old clock on the landing was striking seven, the maid had taken away the tea-things, and Mr. Brande had gone back to his study and his books. Janet was just putting the last stitches to a piece of work she held in her hand. It was a christening-robe she was making for her first godchild, Bessie Dalby's baby. The buxom bride of a year ago was a month-old mother now; and Janet had promised that the little red-faced morsel of humanity which the happy Bessie had exhibited to her with such complacent exultation, should be attired, on its first public introduction to the outer world, in a robe of her own manufacture.

For she knew full well that the poor care more for the service of the heart from those above them, than for that which is of the hand alone; and that Bessie Dalby's baby would acquire new

dignity in even its mother's eyes, because "Mrs. Clyde, bless her, had made the frock as he was christened in every bit herself." She fastened in the last little string, and then folding the tiny garment together, laid it in her work-basket, and took from the table a volume that had just come in the book-parcel from Bedesby, and sat down to read.

But a "spirit in her feet" drew her out into the sunny garden. It seemed an insult to be poring over printed pages when all nature was saying with silent, persistent voice, "Come out and read me." She shut up her book until twilight brought the lamp, and fetching her hat, went out through the glass door of the window, and began slowly, as was her wont, to pace up and down beneath the long row of limes, laburnums, and beeches, that ran down nearly the whole length of the garden.

Janet used to enjoy these garden strolls, going out just when the fancy moved her, and drinking in the pleasant out-door freshness. And indeed these little glimpses of nature, falling into the midst of daily life, are often more precious than those which

we obtain in our more laboured search for beauty, when, with knapsack and Alpine stock, Murray, or Black, we sally forth over mountain and moor, and wearily woo her to unveil her charms.

And it was such a pleasant, rambling old garden, that of the Priory House; not at all like those attached to our modern villas, which look almost like a problem in Euclid done in landscape, so painfully prim that the very shadows of the trees falling on the grass seem to disturb the starched symmetry of the whole. For this garden was not very carefully kept; old Graham, the miscellaneous man belonging to the establishment, had too much else upon his hands to give it more than a divided attention. But year by year, as spring lifted her head from the lap of winter, primroses, violets, and anemones flocked here to greet her waking; and the saucy crocus laughed in your face, and the snowdrops trembled beneath your feet; and the tall hollyhocks, the crimson-belled fuchsias, the roses, damask, white, and red, with all the motley tribe of old-fashioned English flowers, came up and blossomed of their

own accord; and sweet herbs, lavender, marjoram, and balm, scented the summer air. And then, later on, the autumn sun tanned the golden jennets and pippins on the trees which the provident old monks, with their glistening crowns, and twinkling eyes, and fat, warm hands, had planted among the thick-leaved sycamores and spreading limes and beeches. And in the hottest days these cast a cool shadow on the mossy walks, and afforded a quiet home to birds innumerable, who in their leafy recesses twittered and sang, built their nests, brought up their families, and finally settled them in the world in undisturbed tranquillity.

And this hushed, sequestered garden, sorted well with Janet's secluded life; for since her return home after those few stormy months which followed her marriage, a great calm had brooded over her whole existence. No rippling light of joy sparkled on its quiet current; no hasty breeze of anger or distress had leave to ruffle its even flow. It glided along within its narrow boundaries smoothly, silently, in an ever-deepening channel, the outer life untroubled, the

inner one unsunned, save by the happiness of others. For Janet was no morose recluse, shutting herself up sullenly in a little world of her own, which she thought none of her neighbours worthy of entering. She went in and out pleasantly among them with a bright look and a kind word, and warm-hearted sympathy for all; ministering gladly to the needs of the village poor; tending with womanly care the household at home; chatting gaily with her father when he emerged from the seclusion of his study; listening patiently to the trickling gossip of little Miss Gale and her compeers in the world of Marton society; fulfilling all those sweet offices of charity which it is the province of women to perform. And yet sometimes she wearied of the grey monotony of her days. She longed to tear off the narrow corslet of circumstance which pressed so tightly round her, and to give her whole being room to expand.

For it was but a half life that she was living now; she knew, she felt it. There was so much in her lying dead and unused, that at times, like a cramped limb, woke her up to a pricking, sting-

ing consciousness of its existence. She could have wished to live a full, harmonious life, in which every faculty should be in constant exercise; yet on every side she found herself arrested, a hand laid upon her to which she must submit; that little Marton world closed around her so. She was ready to cry out with impatience sometimes as she felt herself stifling, withering beneath its repressing influences. For there was so little in it for her higher nature to feed upon. And the rich stores of her graceful fancy and cultivated mind were as coins not current among its matter-of-fact inhabitants. For more than a year, too, the Canon and Alison, her only friends, had been abroad. It was the only thing, the London physician had said, to save the life of Alison, who for long had seemed to be fading away, as a thin wreath of smoke fades into the blue heaven beyond. So they had left the Marton flats and fogs, and gone to try whether under the sunnier skies of France and Italy health might be won back to the cherished invalid.

And when they were gone, Janet felt herself alone indeed; she missed the response she had

always found in them to that which formed her truest life. She must keep silence now where once there had been the free, glad flow of thought; and to a nature like hers silence and solitude, so far as they extended, were stagnation and starvation.

But to-night, as she walked up and down beneath the blossoming trees, the spring freshness thrilled her spirit with a keener feeling of the glad life that was rushing through everything around her, stirring and rousing all within her to meet the influences that were streaming in upon her. She felt the subtle force waking within her a new, indefinite sense of happiness. For a moment, a strange light seemed to be shining on her life; herself, her home, her every-day environment, glistened in the sunshine; it was like a glimpse into another world, showing her what life *might* become. She tried to retain the impression, but as it came, so it passed away, like the rosy tinge cast for an instant by a sunset cloud upon a grey old crag. The red gleam was fading, too, from the broad trunks of the beeches, and a breeze beginning to flutter among the top-

most leaves. She turned, and went back through the open doors into the dining-room. As she closed them behind her, she could see the after-glow of sunset, which still lingered above the low Wold hills, and the keen clear light of the crescent moon, just peeping through the trees. But within the firelight had it all its own way, and gave to the room an aspect of warmth, seclusion, and repose, which Janet was unwilling to disturb by lighting the great Argand lamp that Hannah had placed in readiness upon the table.

She stood still a moment, watching the pleasant glow of the ruddy light as it shone back from the polished mouldings of the panelled walls, the leaping flames flinging out from time to time wayward flashes of light that danced in and out of the corners of the room, playing over the massive old furniture, and hiding themselves among heavy folds of the crimson curtains. The old room never looked so well as at this time of day. For the broken light which hid the threadbare patches on the Turkey carpet, the faded colours of the damask drapery, and the worn places on the embossed covers of the chairs, brought out into

stronger relief the old ancestral portraits in their tarnished frames, the deep mouldings of the oaken cornice, and the rich carving of the antique furniture which it was Hannah's pride to keep so scrupulously bright.

Old Rollo lay across the hearthrug, his shining muzzle resting on his outstretched paws, his eyes opening and shutting in sleepy enjoyment of the warmth. Since Miss Brande's departure, he had been allowed the freedom of the oak dining-room, walking in and out at pleasure, and selecting for his resting-place the most eligible spot upon the rug without fear of molestation.

He gave a low growl of delight as Janet entered the room, and stretching himself, rose and came towards her, thrusting his black muzzle into her hand for the caress, which to the big, loving brute was the great happiness of his life. And Janet was always ready to bestow it, for in truth Rollo had become a great friend and companion to his mistress, as dumb creatures often are to those who live of necessity much in solitude. She stood now for awhile stroking down the dog's head, running her fingers through his shaggy coat,

making the poor fellow as happy by her notice as his nature would allow ; and then, not caring to light the lamp, sat down almost without a thought, to the piano.

She had no special work on hand just now, to reproach her by its neglect for her want of industry, and she was still not exactly in the mood for reading. For it seemed as if the thoughts of others would be but an intrusion when her own were welling up so fast within her. She would sit down and talk to herself in music.

Among other small changes that had taken place in the house on her aunt's departure, Janet had had her mother's grand piano brought out of the seldom-used drawing-room into this, which they constantly occupied. Music had always been a great resource to Janet, not on its own account alone, but also as affording to her in her lonely life a means of telling out much that in no other way could have found expression. It had been an unspeakable solace in that terrible time that intervened between her recovery from the illness that followed her wedding tour, and her return to her Marton home. It had seemed then some-

times as if, but for this means of relief, her mind must have utterly given way beneath the burden of misery heaped upon her. She would sit for hours alone in Mrs. Clyde's drawing-room in the Abbey Close house, pouring out in a flood of passionate song the bitter memories, the remorse, the hopeless weariness, by which her spirit was overcharged; or, her very soul trembling through the notes, would find in the tones of long despair entangled among the wailing discords of some plaintive *Miserere* a requiem for the dead hopes of her youth.

Sometimes Alison, listening, would give a sigh of mute concern as the young wife thus unconsciously betrayed the secret so closely folded down beneath the veil of passive indifference. It was all she could do, for Janet, with the morbid sensitiveness of a grief itself not free from fault, shrank from the slightest touch of sympathy. But now what once had been a solace had grown into a pleasure, and as she sat this evening at the piano in the mingling firelight and twilight, she almost wondered by-and-bye to find herself so gay. For as she still played on, pleasant

thoughts and fancies came trooping—whence she hardly knew—into her mind, to which all the while, her fingers, wandering over the keys, kept up a fitful accompaniment of sweet rippling sound. Now a tender, wild fantasia, now a bar or two of some familiar melody, drops of song that melted as they ran into the sparkling flow of a graceful *scherzo* that filled the air with its laughing tones.

And all the time the twilight was deepening without, the dancing flames subsided into a steady, fervid glow. Old Rollo, who had stretched himself again upon the rug, lay basking in the warmth, now and then giving a lazy flap with his tail, as though he would assure his mistress that he was not so unmannerly as to go to sleep in her presence, but was ready to rouse up and make himself agreeable if occasion should require.

And still Janet played on, though in the dim decreasing light she could only feel, no longer see, the keys; translating into music all the vague emotions which the spring freshness, with its sense of wakening life, had breathed into her spirit. She was so absorbed in what she was

doing, that she did not hear the sound of steps on the crisp gravel beneath the window, or notice that some one had stepped through the door that opened out into the garden, until she heard her father's voice speaking to her from the further end of the room.

She rose half-startled, and turning round, perceived, to her surprise, that he was accompanied by their new neighbour from the Hall. Taken thus at unawares, she went forward to meet them, not without a half-perceptible tremor of restraint. Her father introduced her with his usual stately courtesy, then having recovered her self-possession, Janet gave her hand to Mr. Holdych, who was apologizing for making his first visit at such an unseasonable hour.

"Mr. Brande has tempted me here by promising to show me through his telescope this beautiful new moon. I have often wished to obtain such a view of it, but never had an opportunity till now, and you see I was not able to resist it when it came."

"I hope you will be gratified," said Janet, feeling thankful that in their new neighbour her

father had met with some one who possessed at least this common ground of interest with himself. "And, indeed, you could not have come at a more favourable time. The moon always looks the best when she is quite young, from three or four to seven days old. At least I think so myself."

"She loses her charms as she grows older," said Mr. Brande, venturing, an unusual thing with him, upon a joke.

"So I have understood," said Mr. Holdych, stooping, as he spoke, to pat the shaggy head of Rollo, who had got up from before the fire upon his entrance, and was now snuffing inquiringly about him, as was his custom with strangers. Apparently the dog was satisfied with the result of his investigations, for after standing a moment to receive with dignified indifference the attention bestowed upon him, he gave a single vigorous switch with his huge tail, and turning about again, went leisurely back to his place on the rug.

"I shall be obliged to keep you waiting a few moments while I adjust the glasses of the tele-

scope," said Mr. Brande. "Janet, will you not have the lamp lighted? you are almost in darkness."

Janet rose to comply with her father's wish, and as he closed the door behind him, the clear light of the lamp flashed through the room. It showed her Mr. Holdych, leaning back in one of the deep, carved chairs, regarding her with that intent, inquiring gaze which she had felt upon her the other day in church.

"This is not the first time we have met, I think," said he, his face relaxing as he met her eye, into its usual expression of easy courtesy.

"No," replied Janet, her voice fluttering uneasily on the word.

"You remember it, then?"

Remember it? Does the pilgrim remember the shadow of the great rock in the weary land, beneath which he lay down faint and spent, and gathered back just life enough to carry him again upon his way? And that terrible time was not yet so far behind her that Janet should have forgotten its one hour of rest.

"Indeed I do," she replied, in a tone uncon-

sciously betraying more than words would have revealed.

"It is long since now. More than five years ago, I think, is it not?"

Janet bowed her head in reply. Somehow she did not care to trust her voice to answer him. She had been taken by surprise in what her visitor had said, and felt half angry that she should have so little command over herself as even now to wince so desperately when that old wound was touched.

Perhaps he saw that somehow the subject jarred upon her, for immediately Mr. Holdych turned the conversation into a different channel.

"I interrupted you when I came in. You were playing, were you not? Something, too, that I did not recognise."

"I dare say not," said Janet. "It was only a vagary of my own."

"Ah, then," returned he, with a smile, "you talk to yourself in that way sometimes."

"When I am in an idle mood, as I happened to be to-night. And it was an idle time too, you know, 'betwixt the gloaming and the murk.'"

Leonard looked amused.

"You need not excuse your idleness while you spend your time as you were doing when I came in. Do you think you could remember that little fantasia again?"

"Oh no," said Janet, "I never recollect what I play in that way. It just comes and goes of itself."

"According to the mood you are in."

Janet smiled.

"It is a great gift," said Leonard; "one which I have often wished that I possessed myself. But I suppose it is one of those things that cannot be acquired."

"I don't know. It seems very simple to me. But it is indeed a great resource. It makes up so often for the want of some one to talk to."

Janet paused abruptly, feeling that this last piece of confidence was rather unnecessary to one who was still almost a total stranger.

"So you feel this want sometimes," asked Mr. Holdych, with a curious modulation in his voice.

But Janet was spared the necessity of making a reply, by the entrance of Mr. Brande.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting so long," said he, addressing Mr. Holdych, "but all is ready now if you will come. You had better bring your hat. The telescope is in the study, but it is chill with the window open."

Leonard rose.

"I suppose you have seen the sight so often that it has no attractions now for you," he said, turning to Janet.

"Oh no, it is always fresh to me. I never tire of watching the tips of mountains creeping up into the light, and the shadows lengthening behind them. But I am very selfish," she added, with a smile, "and prefer looking at it at my leisure, when no one else is waiting to take their turn."

"And is all this to be seen?" asked Leonard.

"Oh yes; and a great deal more besides, by patient observers; but I must not keep you talking any longer, or the moon will have gone quite down behind the trees. It will not shine much longer now."

When they were gone, she went and stood by the fire, looking thoughtfully into the red embers,

and listening to the low whisper of the dancing flames. It was strange how near, and yet how far off just then, seemed that old time which had been brought so sharply to her remembrance by those words of her visitor. And then looking back to that stormy period through the quiet years that lay between, musing on its weariness, its unrest and strife, she saw, as she had never done before, that not happiness and wise deeds alone, but suffering and remorse itself, nay even the wrong-doing which brings repentance with it, are themselves as unseen hands, building up in the dark a house in which the soul may dwell worthily, and aiding in that great work, the growth of character, which, indeed, to those who think truly, is the one chief end and highest aim of this earthly life of ours.

## CHAPTER XI.

### ROGER LEE, SIR.

IT was the morning after his visit to the Priory House, and Leonard was sitting at his library table, engaged in his usual after-breakfast occupation of examining and answering his letters for the day.

Perhaps, of all the minor blessings attendant on a country life, that of having but one delivery of letters instead of a dozen in the day, is to be reckoned among the chief. "The Post" forms a definite starting-point whence we proceed to our diurnal duties or pleasures, as the case may be. The budget of news is brought in and discussed, together with the coffee and eggs, and then we can pull up the drawbridge, snap our fingers at

the world without, and for the next twenty-four hours are at liberty to do as we list, unless indeed we are invaded by a telegram, and to that even country seclusion must submit to give admission.

Mrs. Grant had ironed the *Times*, and hung it over the back of the great lounging-chair beside the fire, which was roaring now with a hissing pine log in its glowing centre. For, though the sun was shining in at the library windows, yet it was one of those biting mornings, full of catarrh and east wind, wherewith the charming May, after her shrewish fashion, delights to pinch the fingers of her deluded admirers. But Leonard, retaining still the instincts of official life, was despatching his business before indulging in his paper—sorting out his letters, to some of them writing rapid answers in an open vigorous hand, laying aside others for more mature deliberation.

At last only one remained unanswered. It was from his solicitor in London, who wrote to the effect, that acting upon Mr. Holdych's instructions, he had taken steps towards procuring

a tenant for Marton Hall, and had just received a highly advantageous offer from a gentleman, who was willing to take it either by the year, or for a longer period, as Mr. Holdych might prefer. He added that, as the gentleman was desirous of entering into immediate possession, perhaps Mr. Holdych would favour him with an early answer.

This letter Leonard read carefully, once, twice; then he folded his arms upon the table, and looked across to the opposite wall, as though he would pierce it through with his gaze. He got up and paced for awhile slowly up and down the room; now and then he stood still, with his eyes fixed upon the floor. Evidently the matter under consideration was one respecting which he found it difficult to decide. At last he sat down and wrote his reply. He said that he had decided on remaining at Marton himself for an indefinite period—possibly a few months, possibly for a much longer time, and that consequently it would be necessary for Mr. Howe to close at once any negotiations into which he might have entered respecting a tenant for the Hall.

This done, he folded and sealed the letter, put it with the others to be posted, and, taking his *Times* from the back of the chair, sat down quietly to its perusal. He had hardly, however, glanced down more than a single column when Mrs. Grant knocked at the door.

"Here's Roger Lee, sir, asking to see you."

Leonard felt impatient. If there is one thing more provoking to a man than another, unless it is being kept waiting for his dinner, it is being disturbed when he has just settled himself down to read his paper. Mrs. Grant saw at once that her master was annoyed at the interruption. But he only said,

"You can show him in."

And the next moment Roger, dressed in his plain-cut suit and twirling his broad-brimmed hat in his hand, entered the room and looked about uneasily, as if at a loss how to dispose of himself in the midst of such unaccustomed magnificence.

Leonard pointed him to a chair. He had seen Roger once or twice, working in his smithy, but had not spoken to him as yet, though he had had a long talk one day with Marget, when he had

heard of her being at the Hall, and had sent for her to him into the library.

"My name's Roger Lee, sir," said the smith, seating himself cautiously on the edge of the blazoned chair. "Mebby, you know, sir, as we're Metherdisses, me an' my wife, an' I've made bold to trouble you about a bit o' bisness."

Leonard nodded to him to go on.

"We've had it on wer minds, sir, for a good bit, us Metherdisses here in Marton, to build us a chapel. We have preaching now in John Brighouse's barn, and the Bedesby preacher comes o' Sundays, afternoons an' evenings. You see, sir, we have the money promised, good part on it, nobbut we could get a bit o' land convenient."

Leonard cast a searching glance on the rugged face before him. He read there, in its sunny simplicity, its shrewd intelligence, in the anxious look of the honest blue eye, that here was a nature that would ring. Roger, too, with that wonderful freemasonry that exists among all true souls, in whatever rank they may be found, felt somehow, dimly but surely, that in the new

squire he saw a man to whose native nobility the Marton estate itself was a mere appendage—by no means the cause of the greatness by which a moment before he had been so awed.

"And you want me to let you have a piece, I suppose," said Leonard, in a cool, restrained tone, through which, nevertheless, a certain geniality made itself felt.

"Why, yes, sir," answered Roger, gathering confidence from the look in the squire's face, "if you was agreeable. We was on at Mr. Wimsley a good bit sin' about it, but we couldn't make nowt out on him. There's a skreed o' land runs down just again the town pump, sir, as we'd set wer minds on. It stands i' no stead now, sir; it's nobbut potaty ground, an' poorish land, too," added Roger, looking up eagerly into Leonard's face. "It would be putting it to a good purpose, sir, to build a chapel on it."

"But I don't see," replied Leonard, who had been turning over the matter in his mind, "that you need a chapel in Marton at all. There is a very good church, quite large enough to accom-

modate the people in the village. Why do you not go to it?"

"Why, sir," said Roger, beginning to feel more at ease now that he had got fairly launched off on his subject, "we goes there of a Sunday morning allays. But you see, sir, we can't use wer freedom there, same as we can in a chapel. An' besides, they don't have service there o' nights, not through the winter, an' us Metherdisses is hungry folks, sir, an' looks to lay in a good stock of a Sunday to last well through the week. An' you see, sir, it's pretty near all the chance we have. We're not like gentlefolks as can sit 'em down to a good book when they think they will. We mun be tewing hard from Monday morning while Saturday night, an' think werselves well off if we can get to a prayer-meeting of a Wednesday night between whiles."

Roger's racy way of talking amused Leonard, and disposed him to carry on a conversation which he had not felt much inclined to begin.

"So you have prayer-meetings, too," said he. "Then does the preacher come from Bedesby to them?"

"Bless you, no, sir," exclaimed Roger. "We does it werselves. There's nobody need be idle among the Metherdisses. There's work for 'em all. It's same as when they built the temple yonder at Jerusalem. There's them as does the gilding, an' the painting, an' the fine carving; them's church parsons, like t' Canon here, an' t' Bishop at Bedesby, an' such like, an' the Lord gives 'em the tongue o' the larned for it. But then, there's stonemasons, an' carpenters, an' plasterers wanted, an' labourers for to dig t' foundations, an' shovel t' rubbish away. Them's us Metherdisses; an', bless the Lord, we can all do summut to help. An' if a man hasn't preaching gifts, why it's a poor tale if he hasn't praying gifts; any ways, if he's a tongue in his head, he can frame to tell folks summut o' what the Lord's been a doing for him. I never knew a man yet as had a heart to love the Lord but what he'd a tongue to praise Him as well; but there's a vast o' folks as it 'u be a deal better if they'd praise the Lord a little for what He's given 'em, instead o' spending their breath grumbling for what they're better without; but

there's some folks hasn't eyes to see their blessings, nobbut their troubles."

"And do you think," said Leonard, "that all this praying and preaching does you any good?"

"The Lord have mercy upon you, sir," cried Roger, in a fit of genuine compassion for his hearer's benighted condition. "What, an' when the Lord offers us a blessing, are we to cast it back in his face as if it wasn't good enough for us? No, no, sir! I like to play out my soul before God by mysel'. There's a deal o' things as you can say to Him as you'd think shame to say to anybody else; but he never said a truer word than when he telled us, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of you.' There's nowt warms you up like getting along wi' them as is going same track as yersel'. Mebby, we shout a bit, but when a man's so full o' joy he hardlins knows how to bear, he can't keep it all corked up like a bottle o' flat ginger-beer. It 'll fin' its way out, sir; he can't help hisself."

There was no mistaking the glow of enthusiasm which lit up the honest man's face as he

spoke these words. Somehow it recalled to Leonard the purple glory he had seen the other day falling on the battered hassock in the church. This hard-handed smith, toiling the week through at his sooty forge, had found something which gave to his daily life a nobility not its own, and like the fabled philosopher's stone, turned its meanness into gold.

Leonard was growing interested in the man.

"And don't you find," said he, "after all this, that it is rather a descent to come down to every-day life again?"

The smith looked puzzled.

"I mean," said Leonard, "that if you have such a gift for prayer, it is a pity to spend your life putting on horse-shoes and wheel-tires."

"Nay, nay, sir," returned Roger, as he caught at the squire's meaning; "there's nowt i' work to let a man down. Why, the Apostle Paul hisself had a trade, an' worked at it an' all, an' it isn't for the likes of us to be setting up wer-selves above him. I mind when I were a young man, afore I were married, I had it strong upon me as I were cut out for summut better nor

blacksmith's work, and yet nowt else seemed to turn up; so I went over one day to Bedesby to old Mr. Rowe, that were the preacher there, to oppen my mind to him, an' says he to me, 'Young man,' says he, 'don't be overkeen o' shifting yourself out o' t' place as the Lord's putten you in. Wait while he does it for you,' says he. 'Mebby he sees as you aren't perfect at what he's putten ye to, an' he's waiting while you frame a bit better afore he give you another job. Somebody has to do blacksmith's work, an' he's putten you tull it, an' he looks out to see as you do it well.' So I come home, an' I made up my mind if ever there was a good blacksmith in this world it should be Roger Lee o' Marton. An' I've never rued it since," said Roger, bringing down his closed fist with a thundering blow upon his outstretched palm.

"But would you not like more time for your religion," asked Leonard, "than your day's work lets you have?"

"Bless you, sir," returned the smith, "why my work's all religion. It's a poor tale if a man can't turn his duties into means o' grace.

Nobbut he brings a right sperrit tull 'em they won't hinder his soul from rising. They're like the string of a boy's kite. It seems to pull at it like, and keep it from getting up higher; but cut it, an' you'll see your kite 'll tumble fast enough. Why when I've turned a good job o' work out o' my hands, I allays feels as if I'd been listening to a sermon as had for a text, 'Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men.' There's a deal o' the texts in the Bible, sir, is for working men, an' they just have to preach their own sermons from them in their lives."

"And better ones, I daresay, than many that we hear from pulpits," said Leonard, half forgetting who was his auditor. "One could wish that the Bible had been written more plainly, or else that preachers would cease their endless wrangling about creeds and doctrines, which their hearers neither understand nor care about."

"Nay, nay, sir," returned Roger, who had no fear of man before his eyes, and resented a slight on his Master's messengers as though it had been cast upon himself. "Hungry folks doesn't

quarrel with their victuals. If you can't relish what's set afore you, it's a sign there's summut wrong in your own inside."

"But," said Leonard, nowise affronted by the smith's plain-spoken remark, "do you never get puzzled yourself with the contradictions in the Bible?"

"Mebby I do, sir," replied Roger, who regarded these inquiries as a gracious sign on the part of the new squire—"mebby I do; but it's nobbut a fool that 'll turn up his nose at good meat, because he can't swallow the platter an' all. The Bible's the word o' God, an' we can't look to understand it all, no more than we can empty a quart pot intil a pint mug; but the fault's in werselves, sir, not in the Bible. I mind when I were a little lad, we'd an auld coo in the paddock aback of our house, an' there was me an' two or three more used to teaze this cretur awful. You see it was a kicking beast, an' my mother had warned us off it a good few times. However, one day she caught us plaguing of it. Well, she just marched the other lads out o' t' paddock, an' shut the gate on 'em, wi' never a word; but she

took me in, an' says she, quite grave and quiet like, 'Roger,' says she, 'I mun see as thee doesn't forget again.' An' wi' that she took a birch twig, an' then—I was a sperrity little chap, but I know I skreed out like mad. I could ha' danced again when she'd done; but I warrant you I never went near the auld coo again. Now I was an awful lad for a mischief, but I wasn't bad at the core, an' I knew well enough I'd nobbut gotten what I'd earned. But I mind standing up at the windy, an' thinks I to myself, now if my mother loves me better nor she does the other bairns, why does she beat me an' not them? An' I couldn't even it to myself nohow. Now you see, sir, we're just God Almighty's bairns, an' there's a deal o' things both what he does tull us in wer lives, an' what he says tull us in his word, as we can't make out. We haven't abilities for it, no more than a little bairn has abilities to understand what its father an' mother does. The wisest on us is nobbut like bairns in petticoats, while we've gotten these poor mortal bodies on us. We mun slip 'em off, an' get breeked, afore we've sense enough to see things rightly."

Leonard turned aside to hide a smile. The idea of angels in breeches was too much even for him.

"So you see, sir," continued Roger, "I never heeds all this talk about free grace, an' election, an' free-will, an' necessity, nor the origin of evil, nor how the Lord can will all to be saved, an' yet let some find their way to hell at last. I just takes it all, an' waits. There's light enough for them as wants to find their way, an' shadows enough to get lost in for them as doesn't. But bless the Lord," added he, his broad face beaming with the light from within, "if the road to heaven's narrow, its straight, an' a wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein."

Leonard turned round, his face grave again now.

"Well, Roger," said he, rising, "you are a wise man, and a happy one, too; and I daresay you are beating out a better life on that anvil of yours than some who have better chances than you for doing so. I will let you know about the bit of land; but I must write to Dr. Birney first about it. Of course, if he has any prejudice

against dissenters, I should not like to annoy him by having a meeting-house built in the village."

"To be sure, sir," replied Roger. "But he has no grudge again us, hasn't the rector. He's a Christian, forbye being a gentleman, an' he's willing to let folks go their own gate nobbut they win right at last. He isn't one o' them as thinks no pie's good but what they've had a finger in theirselves. But I ax your pardon, sir, for keeping you so long, an' I return you a many thanks for your kindness."

And Roger edged his way backwards towards the door, and with a clumsy bow, full, nevertheless, of hearty good-will to his new landlord, he took his departure, inwardly rejoicing, as he walked homewards through the blythe free air, at the prospect of success for his cherished undertaking, which his courteous reception had seemed to promise.

## CHAPTER XII.

### FRESH AIR.

THIS first visit of Mr. Holdych's to Janet and her father seemed to have given the tone to the friendship that soon sprang up between himself and the little family at the Priory House. Not that there was in it any of the slipshod familiarity which is too often dignified by the name of friendship, and which means only that at all hours of the day you are to be liable to the inroads of those who choose to inflict themselves upon you, but there was a pleasant ease pervading their intercourse, which made it from the first, sit comfortably upon them, like a coat

which has been in use long enough to accommodate itself readily to the peculiarities of the wearer's form, without as yet incurring the suspicion of incipient seediness.

Mr. Holdych had wisely resolved not to burden himself, at the outset of his residence at Marton, with social encumbrances in the shape of superficial acquaintances, which, by-and-bye, might possibly prove a drag. The Rectory was at present shut up, and there being no other family in the immediate vicinity of the Hall that presented many attractions to his somewhat fastidious taste, he did not respond with any remarkable degree of warmth to the advances of such of his nearer neighbours as felt themselves privileged to make them, but confined himself rather to those general attentions, which, being paid alike to all, abundantly satisfied the claims of society, without opening the way to anything beyond a cordial, but restricted intercourse.

There is a spiritual freemasonry, however, among kindred natures, which draws them to-

gether wherever they may be. Most people know what it is to meet with those, whose hand, from the first time it is put within their own, fits it as the acorn fits the cup; just as there are others who remain to us life-long strangers, though bound up, it may be, in the same household bundle with themselves.

It was no great wonder, then, if Leonard cultivated, with an assiduity unusual for him, the society of the inmates of the Priory House, or if they willingly accorded to him the place among them which he seemed disposed to seek. And in truth the friendship so soon established was very pleasant to them all; it seemed to supply to each a want that had been unmet before; it drew even the quiet Mr. Brande out of himself. The grave, scholarly old man came forth from his seclusion like a hermit-crab from its shell, rejoiced to meet with one who had conversed with most of the great *savans* of the day, and who knew as men, those who to him were but distinguished names.

And Janet listened, with an interest hitherto

unknown, to one whose life had touched that of the world at so many points. The narrow circle of her little Marton horizon expanded as she looked through his eyes, and saw, as on a stage, what was going on beyond. And he could tell her of the men and women whose writings had made them to her like familiar friends; he could describe to her scenes and incidents of foreign travel; he could tell her of life in its higher forms in the great capitals of Europe. Above all, he could draw her out to talk of things which so long she had kept in silence, because she had none to respond to her own interest in them; and where her weak woman's feet trod doubtingly, he could hold her up, and carry her with him onwards into wider and yet wider fields of thought and fantasy. No wonder if, by-and-bye, Janet's eyes learned to grow bright when she saw this guest appear, or if time to her began to fly swiftly while he stayed.

And to Leonard, too, it was a relief to breathe the fresh, pure air of that quiet household life. It was like finding himself resting on the soft, green

sward, with cool breezes fanning his brow, and the music of a running brook sounding in his ears, after toiling for long upon the dusty high-road of political life. For though Janet was not a brilliant woman by any means, and would have felt out of her element altogether if she had been set down in full dress in a London drawing-room, and expected to keep up a running fire of small talk with a crowd of strangers, yet at home she was a thoroughly pleasant woman, with a sunny cheerfulness in all her ways that won upon you unawares, and shed a warm bright light around her wherever she might be. There was a sparkle, too, in her talk, as of wavelets glancing in the light, and yet always beneath the ripple of casual conversation there flowed the deeper current of thought and feeling, which even in her lightest moods betrayed that hers was not a merely shallow mirth, but the genial flow of a nature profound as well as clear.

You knew instinctively, listening to her voice, that here was a woman who had lived no listless, careless life, but had gathered into herself all the

influences by which she had been surrounded, drawing from them strength and sweetness into her nature, ripening and softening through sorrow and through joys, as the crude, green fruit of spring swells and mellows, through sunny days and stormy nights, into the golden richness of maturity. There was a rare simplicity, too, in all she said and did, an unconscious truthfulness of thought, and word, and deed, very refreshing to a man, who, like Leonard, had seldom seen women except through the artificial medium of fashionable life. For Janet's was a nature open as the day, transparent as the amber light that rests on autumn fields. Something even of her old impulsive way clung round her still, the girlish eagerness and shyness which were not quite toned down to that graceful *insouciance* so essential to the manners of a finished woman of the world. But then Janet was not, as Leonard soon found out, a woman of the world. Nature never intended her to be one. She was something more rarely to be met with—a thoroughly womanly woman. And, with imperfections as

well as graces, Janet was a woman at once to love and lean upon, with a character in which was a nice blending of sense and sweetness. Firm she was as well as pliable, brave and bright, and self-possessed as she was tender, true, and self-forgetting.

And she was reticent too, and this is always a great attraction in a woman. Not that she was reserved or close, but she had a delicate perception of what might be repeated and what had been meant for her ear alone. It was this rare reticence which to Leonard formed one great charm in her society. He liked to feel that for once he had met with a woman who was a non-conductor of what she heard, and that he might speak forth his opinions, criticize as sharply as he pleased, or indulge in nonsense when he was in the mood, without the fear of having his conversation reported, or his words carried about to a whole host of intimate friends.

And so it fell out that by the time he had been a month at Marton, there were few days when the new lord of the manor did not find himself drawn

to beguile the solitude of life at the Hall, by the society of the fair young mistress of the Priory House.

Little Miss Gale, whose quick eyes detected everything that was going on, did not fail to take note of these frequent visits. She remarked, moreover, that the Reedes, the Staceys, and the Newtons, who composed the remaining portion of the upper-ten-dom of the village, and were, to say the least, quite as much thought of in general society—though to be sure Mrs. Clyde was ten times more agreeable than any one of them—had only been honoured by a single call. She drew her own conclusions from the fact, and nodding her head sagaciously, declared in confidence to each of her friends, that if she was not mistaken, there would be, by-and-bye, a mistress of Marton Hall.

No sooner had Mr. Holdych made up his mind to remain at the Hall, than he set to work in good earnest to remove from it the traces of desertion and decay which had gathered around it, and restore it once again to its pristine state of homelike comfort and manorial dignity. The

ruined walls which had been left standing since the fire, were taken down; the piles of smoke-blackened rubbish cleared away, and instead of an unsightly accumulation of *débris* and dirt, there was now a smoothly sodded plot of bright green turf. The garden, which so long had been a tangled wilderness, was reduced to order, the moss-grown walks were laid with gravel, the hedges clipped, the borders trimmed, the vagrant briers ignominiously expelled, the scrambling vines and rampant creepers were compelled to restrain their unruly propensities, and confine themselves within more narrow bounds. The ragged shrubs made way for glossy araucarias and feathery cedars, which were brought by cart-loads from the nurseries at Bedesby. Here and there a black yew or over-grown holly-tree was cut down, letting in air and sunlight to darkened nooks. Everywhere, grace and beauty took the place of the rank disorder that had prevailed before.

Quaint, the garden was still, with its high beechen alley, and long avenues of limes and elms, its rose-bordered paths and flower-beds of

fantastic form; but instead of a weedy wilderness, desolate even in its luxuriance, it was now a genuine English pleasaunce, according well with the dignified repose of the old Tudor mansion that it surrounded.

And within the house, too, the change was not less marked. The family plate came down from London, a great relief to Mrs. Grant, who no longer had occasion to blush for the empty side-boards, or the poverty-stricken aspect of the long dining-table, when her master sat down to his solitary dinner. A regular staff of servants supplied the place of the single maid, who had hitherto, with occasional assistance, been equal to the entire work of the establishment. Every room was furnished forth with the necessary appliances for elegance and ease. Hangings that had long been carefully folded away, were spread out now to the light. The choice old china, the ornaments of buhl and bronze, the rare articles of *vertu* that had been accumulating for centuries, came out of their hiding-places in the sealed cabinets, and were ranged in order due by the hands of Mrs. Grant. Daylight streamed freely

into the long-darkened rooms; books and newspapers littered the tables and couches. Hats and coats, boots and spurs, with other articles of masculine gear, visible here and there, betrayed unmistakably that the Hall was no longer tenanted only by the two stray members of the feebler sex, who for so many years had been its sole inhabitants.

Day by day the firm tread of the master's foot was heard in the corridors and rooms, while the sound of his voice echoed cheerily around as he gave directions to the workmen who were busily engaged about the place in carrying out his plans for its improvement. Everywhere was life, and activity, and stir. The sleep of years was over at last, and with the arrival of its owner, the ancient mansion seemed to have passed out of its condition of drowsy decay, and become once more the centre of influence to the whole surrounding neighbourhood. For it must not be supposed that the little whirlpool of excitement which the presence of Mr. Holdych had produced, was confined to the precincts of Marton Hall. Like the rippling circlets around a stone dropped into the

waters of a stagnant pool, the agitation extended to the remotest boundaries of the parish. Nay, further still, for it is hardly too much to say, that there was not a politic papa, or a match-making mamma, who could by any possibility consider themselves within visiting distance of the Hall, who were not more or less affected by the waves of influence thus emanating from their new neighbour.

The theme was discussed at dinner-parties at the great houses, and at tea-parties at the lesser ones. If an earthquake had shattered a foreign capital, or a war had broken out in some distant dependency, it would have been felt to have been a matter of trifling moment, compared with the fact that the proprietor of Marton Hall had come to reside upon his estate.

The farmers hoped to have the long-needed repairs granted on their farms, the labourers to have their thatched hovels exchanged for warm and weather-proof cottages, the shopkeepers looked to drive a brisker trade, even the school children speculated on the probability of there being again feasts in the park, such as they had heard their

fathers and mothers talk of having been to in their young days, when, after the games, tea was spread in long tents under the trees in front of the Hall, and tarts and cheesecakes, spice-cake and gingerbread were supplied in such unlimited abundance, that every one was able to eat of the good things provided, until obliged to give over simply because they could eat no more.

And the "nobility, clergy, and gentry of Marton and its vicinity," to use the comprehensive phrase employed by the itinerant lecturers and professors who occasionally honoured Marton with a visit, were delighted to have among them one who had already shown such a commendable disposition to encourage and support those various institutions which supply interest to the life of an English country gentleman.

Every particular relating to his habits and manner of life was carefully collected and eagerly discussed, though beyond the circumstances connected with his official career, little could be gleaned to satisfy the curiosity of the good people of Marton. It was ascertained that after leaving college he had spent several years abroad, and

then through the interest of some distant relatives of his mother's, had obtained the appointment of Queen's messenger, which he had relinquished on succeeding to his uncle's property. Further than this, no one seemed to know much about the new squire, though all agreed that he was likely to prove a most desirable acquisition to the neighbourhood.

From Lady Denham, of Denham Park, who, by virtue of her stately presence, her easy assurance, and her air of bland civility, added to her position as a baronet's wife, reigned supreme, the acknowledged head of the little clique of county families, down to Ben Bardon himself, whose rustic salute was always returned by a frank smile of recognition, every one declared, in rude or courtly phrase, that Leonard Holdych, of Marton Hall, was in all respects worthy of the name he bore. And that was saying a great deal, for from time immemorial the name of Holdych had been held in honour in all the country side, and to the minds of the Marton folk was the symbol of all that was noble, great, and good.

And truth to say, the general verdict was about correct. It is seldom otherwise. Men who win the suffrages of their fellow-creatures are, in most cases, more or less worthy of them, though, of course, it does not of necessity follow that because a man is deserving he will always attain to the topmost round of the social ladder.

Leonard Holdych was at bottom a brave-hearted, open-souled man, not without grave defects of character, which had rooted themselves in his very virtues, yet with a native ease and affability of manners, that like the shining waves upon a rocky beach, overflowed and hid those surface inequalities which render many otherwise estimable men by no means acceptable members of society.

A little too careless, perhaps, of his position, as the Honourable Mrs. Giles Landells, the wife of the county member, who kept a sharp look-out on the proceedings of the new-comer, and had marked therein one or two things that offended her critical taste, observed in confidence to her friend Lady Denham. But then, though she did

not wish it to be generally known, Mrs. Giles Landells having been originally the daughter of a wealthy manufacturer, and owing her present elevation merely to the fact that her ample fortune had afforded a ready means of replenishing the exhausted coffers of her husband, naturally thought very much about "position," and took unusual pains, by fencing herself off from all contact with those beneath her, to preserve her slippery footing among the more firmly established members of the local aristocracy.

Mr. Holdych, however, went on his way serenely unconscious of Mrs. Landells' strictures upon his lax observance of the punctilios of position; chatting sometimes to Roger Lee at the door of his smithy, as familiarly as if he had been on an equal footing with himself; going about among the tenants, making himself acquainted with the various details concerning his estate, and winning golden opinions from all by his frank yet noble bearing, the patience with which he listened to their complaints, and the readiness with which he granted all reasonable requests.

"Every inch a gentleman," as Farmer Dale said, "for all he's as free as if he was one of werselves." And the little circle who were soberly smoking their pipes in the sanded parlour of the Marton Arms, by a general grunt, gave their assent to the remark.

With his equals, it is true, Mr. Holdych was courteous rather than cordial, slightly reserved even towards the M.P. and Sir Marmaduke Denham, whose elaborate civility had almost verged on condescension. Indeed, Lady Denham, with an eye, probably, to her four unappropriated daughters, was overpoweringly polite, and was so profuse in her offers of friendship that he had some difficulty, figuratively speaking, in extricating himself from her toils.

All agreed, however, in lavishing upon him a more than ordinary share of the attentions usually paid to a fresh resident. True, many families were away just now, it being the height of the London season; still a sufficient number remained to keep up quite a round of small gaieties, all having reference more or less to their new neighbour. Leonard did not particularly relish these

provincial assemblies; they lacked the pungency and zest of those which he had been accustomed to frequent, where, as in one brilliant focus, had been concentrated the wit and intellect, the grace and fashion, of the rival capitals of Europe. Awhile ago, perhaps, he would have held himself carelessly aloof, now, however, he laid out before him a plan of life to which he was determined steadfastly to adhere, at all events for the present; and of this plan, the giving and receiving these friendly attentions formed a necessary part.

But at the core of this plan, there burnt like a central fire, another purpose, which sometimes, as he thought of it, inspired him with an energy to which for years he had been a stranger; at others, growing dim and dead, left him inwardly cold and cheerless as before.

It was this which had filled the dull little village with mysterious attractions, and had decided him to take up his abode at Marton, rather than, as he had before intended, in the metropolis; this which drew his feet so often in the direction of the Priory House, and this which had caused

little Miss Gale not unreasonably to conjecture, that the establishment of Marton Hall would by-and-bye be rendered complete by having the fair young widow placed as mistress at its head.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### MR. LEAF'S PARLOUR.

THERE was no denying the fact, that ever since the time of Jessie Lee's leaving Marton, a secret coolness had subsisted between Mrs. Leaf and Marget Lee. Not that it ever openly declared itself by word or look, or got to the length of an absolute cessation of those little friendly offices which had always passed between them. Still Marget seldom went down to the mill now to have a "crack" with her old acquaintance, and Mrs. Leaf, on her part, was accustomed to meet Marget in the street, or at the churchdoor, or coming out of Farmer Brighouse's barn after preaching, without saying more than, "How do you do?" as she passed her by.

Roger and the miller, however, had never abated the friendliness of their intercourse on account of this little shyness that had arisen between their wives. Indeed, Mr. Leaf enjoyed nothing better than a chat with Roger over a quiet pipe and a glass of Marget's best home-brewed, and Roger was always made welcome if he dropped in, as he often did about supper-time at the mill, to have a talk over "society matters," or to discuss a point in politics over a comfortable glass of toddy. For both Mr. Leaf and Roger were diligent readers of the *Bedesby Mercury*, which came out every Saturday, and contained all the news of the neighbourhood, together with a well-packed summary of public intelligence, and a pungent leading article, in which praise and blame were liberally dispensed to the great actors of the day, from the lofty standing-point assumed by the editors of penny provincial papers.

It was about a week after Roger's first interview with the squire, that he stepped down to the mill one evening, when his men had gone home from their work—Roger had been getting up in the world lately, and kept three men now in con-

stant employ—to have a "bit o' talk" with Mr. Leaf about the affairs of the new chapel. Mr. Holdych had given them the promise of a piece of land for the site, and Roger and the miller being the most active members in the little congregation that assembled in John Brighouse's barn, had taken upon themselves the responsibility of gathering together the money wherewith to build it.

On this occasion their conference proved eminently satisfactory. The hearts of the Marton Methodists, as Roger said, had been "opened wonderful." Already more than half the needful funds had been collected, so that there was nothing to prevent them from setting to work at once with the erection. And now Mr. Leaf and Roger had been talking the matter over between themselves before calling together a meeting of the "society" to decide upon the plan to be adopted.

When they had fairly disposed of the business in hand, and had settled all the points that were to be submitted to the meeting, the miller felt himself at liberty to advert to subjects of more general interest. They were sitting in the mill

parlour, over the bright coal fire, which Mrs. Leaf always lighted in an evening, unless the day had been unusually warm.

"She couldn't bear," she said, "to see the empty grate yawning in your face, when daylight was done and candles lit. The room looked so comfortless, without a bit of fire, be it ever so little, to draw up to of an evening."

The miller took up the little black poker, which was accustomed to do duty for the more brightly-polished one that enjoyed a sinecure office within the fender, and shivering with a well-aimed blow a flaky lump of glowing coal, sent a flash of ruddy light dancing through the low green-wainscotted room.

"Now, that's summut like," said Roger, his broad face shining back to the warm blaze which the miller's stroke had made. "It's a thing, though, I should never get leave to do at our house. Marget would cry out pretty sharp at me if I was to break up a piece o' good coal that way. She never lets onybody have a hand at her kitchen fire but hersel'. Says I, sometimes, 'Bless you, what difference will it make burning a bit

more or less, an' us mending the smiddy-fire wi' a skepful at a time?' 'But,' says she, 'there's no call to make the house-fire burn to waste, because the smiddy-fire burns to use.' An' I never argy with her. She's sure to have t' best on't, whether she has t' right on't or no."

"Ay, that's t' way wi' women," said the miller, settling himself again upright in his chair. "They've a way o' putting things while they'd make you give in to owt. Not as I give in to my wife. She knows I'm over sharp for her to come easy over me. But then I will say this for her, she's more sense than any other woman ever I see. She might be a man almost, she has such a headpiece. It's wonderful, considering what a pretty girl she was. Mostly it's the plain 'uns that's the 'cutest, but she's gotten it both inside an' out. There's some, now, thinks a woman hadn't ought to be so 'cute. It makes 'em bad to deal with, they think. They'd rather she was a bit soft. But I don't agree to that. 'Cuter she is an' better, according to my notion, nobbut you must see to it that you're 'cuter still yoursel'. That's where it is, you must be 'cuter still yoursel'.

I allays says there's none worse to manage than them soft wives. You can't persuade 'em to listen to reason. It's like trying to make a empty bag stand on end. Less sense they have an' more contrairy they are. That's my belief. There's more men a deal mastered by silly wives than ever there's been by them as has sense."

"Mebby," said Roger, drily, "it's because sensible ones is scarce. Same as you may say white sheep gives more wool than black uns, because there's more on 'em."

"Talk o' that," said the miller, "I'd a fine sheep as ever was, strayed out o' t' Low Pastur, night afore last, an' got drownded in the dyke, all along o' that there bit o' bad fencing as old Wimsley wouldn't give in to having it mended. It's shameful, the fences on my land. However, things are like to be a bit bettered now t' squire's comed. It's made a sight o' difference already, his being here."

"Ay, it's getting finely sided out now, is Marton," responded Roger. "Things 'll not go their own gate no longer now, I reckon."

"Old Wimsley's gate, you mean," said the

miller, chuckling at his joke. "He's had it pretty much his own way this good bit back."

"He'll find a difference now I doubt," returned Roger. "He's been up to t' Hall mostlins every day this week. I've seen him from t' smiddy going back'ards and forrards with his papers an' books."

"He'll be putten to his pins I lay, to shape his tale to t' squire," said the miller. "He'll find it's one thing having to do with a doited old man like him that's gone, and another with a gentleman as looks after things hisself. It isn't clear to my mind, Mr. Lee, that all's gone into t' old squire's pocket these ten year back that's comed out o' t' tenants'."

"Nay, I wouldn't go for to say that," replied Roger, always ready, worthy man, to cast the mantle of charity over his neighbour's faults. "He's a awful screw, I'm not denying that, but I've that opinion of him that I don't think he'd pocket owt that wasn't his own. Leastways not without he thought he could do it fairly. But then, to be sure, some folks' notions of what's right is very different from what others' is."

"You say true," answered the miller. "There's them as could persuade theirselves that black's white, nobbut they could turn a penny by it. However, that's neither here nor there. Mebby we're none so good werselves, but what there's need for mending." And with this sage remark the miller dropped Mr. Wimsley for the present out of the conversation, and went back to discuss the doings of the new squire.

"He's been going round the estate hissel, an' seeing all the tenants, an' axing of 'em all manner o' questions about their farms, an' the fixin's on 'em, an' such like. He's uncommon 'cute, for all he's a gentleman. We had him down at our place yesterday, an' he see'd in a minute that them there outside fencings on that bit o' land o' mine was in bad repair, an' t' others was well fettled up."

"Says he, 'We must have new gates here,' afore I'd as much as said to him that I'd be glad to have summut done to 'em. An' these five year past I've been on at Wimsley about mending of 'em, an' him as stiff as a staff, an' wouldn't put as much as a penny on t' land, for all I telled him a good bit

back if there wasn't summut done to 'em pretty soon they'd want mending with new uns, they was getting that rickety an' rotten. But there's folks as thinks all's saved that's spared, an' you wont make 'em believe nowt else."

The worthy man had wandered back unconsciously to the subject of his grievance, and might have added still further to the list of the lawyer's shortcomings, had not Mrs. Leaf at this moment entered the parlour, bringing with her through the open door a rush of fragrance from the culinary regions. She was followed by Nancy, bearing a dish of fried ham, the rosy slices nearly hidden by a liberal garnishing of poached eggs, which lay upon them like a delicate enamel of white and gold.

Nancy set down the dish upon the table, Mrs. Leaf adjusting it after her, and then bustled out, returning in a moment with a foaming jug of porter, and a tureen full of young potatoes smoking hot.

"Now, Mr. Lee," said the miller, when the preparations were completed, "draw in your chair an' make yourself at home. There isn't much

choice, but, however, you're welcome to it, an' it's good, I believe, as far as it goes."

"Nay," said Roger, standing behind his chair until Mrs. Leaf was settled in her place, and then seating himself at the table, "there's no call for excuses. I allays thinks myself that two dishes at a meal is one over many, without it be a bit o' pudden or the like o' that at dinner."

"You're in the right of it," cried the miller, who was serving out a plentiful supply of the ham and egg on to Roger's plate. "Our missis there has two sorts oftens, just for 'pearance like, but I mostly sticks to one while I've done, an' then I think, why it's a pity to have to leave t' other."

"Well, I can't say but what I'm partial to a little variety," said Mrs. Leaf. "An' if there's more than one dish on the table, why you're not tied to take of 'em all. I do wonder sometimes, though, myself, how the quality does that has as many as four or five courses comes on one after another. There's soup an' fish now they'll have to begin with, an' then there's meat, an' there's game, an' light things, an' there's tarts an' jellies, an' such

like, comes next; an' then, when all's cleared off an' you'd think they might have done, why there's wine, an' fruit, an' candies, an' all manner o' good things put on, an' they have to set-to again. An' the time it takes 'em, too, to get through with it all. An hour and a half in a reg'lar way, an' more sometimes. Not as they're eating all the time though."

"They'd be pretty nigh stawed if they was, I should think," interposed the miller.

"But they're twiddling, an' waiting, an' getting their plates changed, an' being helped to bits o' this an' bits o' that. How they can frame to like it I can't tell. An' then all the time there's the room full o' servants aback o' their chairs, watching every bit they put into their mouths, an' bringing of 'em things afore they as much as know they want 'em. I used to see a deal of it afore I was married. However, it puts off the time, an' I daresay they're hard set sometimes to know what to do with it."

"Ay, they are that," observed Roger, "I'll warrant. They're like to, when they've nowt to do from morning to night. I allays pities folks

as hasn't plenty to do. They're worse off a deal, to my thinking, than them that's over much. I know that time when I were badly, better nor six year back it is now, after I took a turn an' come down stairs, I'd used to sit up in my chair all day in the chimley corner, an' how slow that old clock of ours used to go to be sure. About three o'clock of an afternoon particklar, it seemed oftens as if the hands had got fairly stuck, an' didn't move forrard a bit. An' then you see dinner an' tea made a sort o' diversion. For when I'd gotten my breakfast, why there was nowt to do while dinner was fit; an' when I'd gotten my dinner, why there was nowt to do while tea, except to take the doctor's stuff, an' I was a'most glad o' that for a change, begging your pardon, Mrs. Leaf, for talking o' such a thing an' us getting wer suppers."

"It's just here," said the miller, rapping the haft of his knife upon the table by way of giving emphasis to his words. "There's nobody has a right, according to my way o' thinking, to take owt out o' t' world without making shift to put summut back instead. Not as I'd have every-

body doing t' same sort o' work. There's some folks is born with a silver spoon in their mouths, an' there's others has to eat out o' pewter all their lives, an' relish their victuals just as well too, for the matter o' that. But this I say, that it's laid on us all to do summut, an' them as shirks work, why, pleasure 'll shirk them, an' serve 'em right, too."

"I do believe," said Mrs. Leaf, when her husband's speech had been followed by a sufficiently respectful pause, "as half the things quality's troubled with, ladies particklar, their low spirits an' their nervousness an' that, comes o' nothing but just that they want summut to employ theirselves with. They're put to it dreadful, is some of 'em, to get over the day, leastways the fore end of it. They do better when it gets on toward night. They've got theirselves to dress, an' their dinners to get, an' balls, an' parties an' things to go to. But then they're just the same again next morning. There was that Mrs. Fitzjohn as I lived lady's-maid with afore I came to the Hall; if you'll believe me, Mr. Lee, she used to lie in bed regular of a morning while past noon, just on

purpose to shorten the day. 'There was nothing to get up for,' she'd say."

"Why, she'd her childer, hadn't she, that Mrs. Fitzjohn?" said the miller.

"Childer!" responded Mrs. Leaf, "to be sure she had. There was five on 'em under seven year old, an' nice little things too, they was, as any mother need wish to have. But then ladies like her makes no count o' their childer, not while they're little, that is to say. They tew hard enough for 'em after when they're old enough to '*come out*,' as they call it. She scarcelins ever used to see hers, didn't Mrs. Fitzjohn; except when she dined at home, they used to be dressed up pretty an' brought in a bit at dessert. She'd have her baby, too, sometimes, and nurse it for five minutes or so, and then send it back to the nursery. 'It fatigued her,' she said, 'having them with her;' an' poor little things, I believe in my heart they were glad enough to get away from her. They thought a deal more of that old nurse of theirs than ever they did of their mother. I've thought oftens and oftens what a pity it was they was wasted on her, and poor

Mrs. Holdych here would have given all she had, an' more, for one! How she used to fret, poor lady, because the squire made so much of her not bringing him an heir! An' yet you'd think she'd all that heart could wish, barring that. But, as I says oftens, there's allays a summut."

"There is that, Mrs. Leaf," said Roger. "It's wonderful it is, how things is evened out tull us. There's some folks you'd think was getting more than their share o' good things, an' you're fit to grumble at it, an' think as it isn't fair for 'em to have so much more nor others. An' then mebby, after a bit, there's summut turns up as nobody had no thoughts on, that brings 'em down pretty much to a level with the rest on us, an' makes you feel thankful after all that you aren't them. I've never see'd the man yet, take him all in all, as I'd be willing myself to change places with."

"Nor me neither," echoed the miller. "Take a drop more porter, Mr. Lee; here's plenty in the jug."

"An' another potaty," said Mrs. Leaf, carefully selecting the finest in the dish. "They're the first we've dug this season, but they're only

poor considering the time o' year. But we don't reckon to have things so forrard now as we had when Reuben was at home. He used to pride hisself on having the first of everything. Even the gardener at the Rectory didn't beat us with new peas, an' potaties, an' cowcumbers, an' such like. I've known him send down to our place unbeknown to the master, if they'd been having company or that, for a boiling of early peas, or sparrowgrass, or a bit o' young rhubarb, if he hadn't 'em ready hisself. He took a deal o' pride in the garden, did Reuben, poor lad. I seem to miss him more an' more every year as comes. I allays rued his going to that farm at Haxby. An' it need never have been if old Wimsley hadn't stood out so again letting us have that piece o' land that joins on to ours. But however, Mr. Lee, we're like to have him back again afore long now. The father's talking about giving up the milling, and putting Reuben into it. He's tewed long enough at the bis'ness, an' we've got enough now, thank God, to keep us comfortable the rest of our days, an' leave something tidy for the childer."

"Three an' thirty years it is come next Michaelmas," said the miller, "sin' my father died, an' I came in to the bis'ness, an' I haven't slept three nights out o' my own house since, nor taken more than as many holidays, without it's been Good Friday or Christmas Day, so I think I've about earned a right to sit me down an' let younger folk do the work. It begins to come heavy on me now, being troubled so with asthma, having to be the day through in the dust o' the mill. I've no notion o' slaving while I'm past enjoying my rest, just for the sake o' leaving a few pound more behind me for them as doesn't need it. Bessy an' Jane got their portions handsome when they was married, an' a young man like Reuben is no better for having over much siller of his own. It'll do him more good, having to fend for himself a bit, same as I had afore him."

"So it will," said Roger; "I allays said one o' the biggest blessings ever I had, an' I've had a many, was not having a penny to start with in life but what I'd earned mysel' while I was prentice to old Jenkins, as had the smiddy bis'ness afore me. It made me that I was forced to stir

mysel', an' stick wi' might an' main to what I were about. Whatever I were doing, I gave my whole mind tull it; an' more betoken, I never did owt as I couldn't ha framed to ax a blessing on. An' you see where I am now. Haven't I proved for mysel' what it says in t' Book, 'The hand o' the diligent maketh rich?' I hev all things an' abound. I've a soun' body, an' a soun' mind, an' a good conscience afore God an' man. An' I've work to do, an' will to do it, an' I allays brings a relish to my meat, an' I've a pretty fair penny laid up i' Bedesby Bank, let alone the smiddy bis'ness. An' I've a wife, bless her, as I wouldn't swap for anything you could show me."

"An' noo!" he exclaimed triumphantly, "where's there a man richer nor me? without it be," he added, his voice sinking to a softer tone, "him as has his childer's childer toddling aboot his knees, an' hugging their auld granddad's neck wi' their little fat arms. But the Lord's will be done. If He hasn't seen fit to give me bairns o' my own, there's Jessie, an' she's like as if she was my own flesh an' blood, an' a good girl she is, an' a dutiful too, both to her aunt an' me."

Here Mrs. Leaf got up from her seat, and going to the door, called to Nancy in the kitchen to come in and clear away the supper things. Then she opened the door of the corner cupboard and took thence a tall black bottle, the sugar basin, and other necessary appliances for making a comfortable glass of toddy for her husband and their visitor, as was the custom at the mill, by way of finishing up the evening.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### IN WHICH MRS. LEAF HAS CHANGED HER MIND.

"I HEARD tell as Jessie were coming back to Marton," said Mrs. Leaf, when all was settled again, and Nancy had brought in the kettle with the boiling water; "but there's so many tales going, I never give heed to what folks say."

"She is, though," said Roger, "an' coming back for good an' all, I expect. The old leddy as she's with is going fast. The doctor says she can't last over a few weeks now at farthest. She's been wanting to leave this good bit, has Jessie, but they kep' begging an' praying of her to stop on, while she couldn't say 'em nay. She's had her wages riz over an' over again. You see, her missis has took to her so while she can hardlins

bear her to be away from her, night or day. She thinks if Jessie was to go she'd never get ony body again that could do for her like her. An' she's taken a deal o' waiting on, she has. She's as helpless as a babby, Jessie says, for all she has her intellecks clear, an' she mummles in her talk, so as no one can make out what it is she means, nobbut them that's well used to her. But she's turned eighty, poor leddy, so you needna wonder."

"Ay, dear," said Mrs. Leaf, who was watching the kettle on the fire until it boiled again, "we needn't wish, none of us, to be spared to that age. I couldn't abide, for my part, to live to be a burden on others. I'd sooner drop off when the work was all out of me, as hang on the bough to wizen up like that. An' so Jessie's coming home when it's all over? She's been long gone, Mr. Lee. She went that same Michaelmas as Reuben went to the farm at Haxby."

"Ay, we didn't think we was parting with her for so long, didn't her aunt an' me," said Roger. "I don't think we could ha' framed to ha' letten her gone if we had. It's same as you

wi' your Reuben. There's allays seemed summut wanting in the house sin' ever she went. She was like a sunbeam, she was, an' never had no thowt for hersel,' so as she could pleasure her aunt an' me. It were the only thing ever she went again us, were that going away, but she was that set upon it there was no turning of her. An' then you see, when she'd ha' been willing to come back tull us, they wouldn't let her away where she was; an' she felt it laid upon her like to stop wi' the old leddy while she lived. However, when we get her back, we shan't be easy persuaded to let her go again, without it be to a home of her own; an' I wouldn't begrudge her that, if so be as she was to make up her mind to it."

Mrs. Leaf was silent. She was busy mixing the toddy, and perhaps it needed special attention. It was a thing she always did herself, both for her husband and his guests. She liked to know that it was rightly mingled, hot and strong, and the glass well-brimmed, although she was never particularly pleased at being called upon to do it a second time.

"Now, Mr. Lee," she said, when she had completed the process, "turn your chair about and make yourself comfortable. I allays thinks a drop o' toddy tastes better in the chimney-corner than when one's set to it at a table."

Roger did as he was desired. The miller, too, shifted himself to a place nearer the fire, first reaching down from the mantel-shelf his long pipe and tobacco-box. The worthy man was not greatly given to self-indulgence in any form whatever. Nature had made it easy for him to be abstemious, indeed his wife, being a clever cook, and proud of her art, used sometimes to lament that her husband was so indifferent to the good things of life.

"Where was the use," she would say, "of being able to set him down to a dinner fit for a duke, when he couldn't tell spinach from sparrow-grass, except by the looks, and never so much as knew one day what he'd had for his dinner the last? Now, there was Martin Doyle's wife, she could turn her husband just as she pleased, with nothing but humouring him a bit in the way of his eating. She had heard her

say she could always get a new bonnet or gown piece out of him, when she wanted, by just treating him for a bit with apricot pies or that, or something tastier than common to his supper. He'd come round as smooth as butter, and give her anything she asked. But with her husband," Mrs. Leaf said, "it was as different as could be. Not that he was near. She had never worn a thing yet after it was shabby for want of money to buy a fresh one. He liked as well as anyone to see his wife well dressed, but then he had to be reasoned out of what he gave her. There was no such a thing as taking him in a better humour than common, and persuading him to let her have what he saw no need for. You might as well try to twist the poker round your finger."

Perhaps Mrs. Leaf's distress might be accounted for on the hypothesis that some people, such as Mr. Leaf for example, are actually defective in the organs connected with the faculty of alimentiveness, just as there are others who have no ear for music or eye for the harmony of colours. Nevertheless, steeped though they may be in indifference to these lower delights, there is

generally some point or other at which they are more or less vulnerable. With the miller this point was his pipe. Not that even in this respect he allowed himself in unseemly indulgence. He never exceeded three pipes a day. One after dinner, one at six o'clock, after the mill was shut up, and another after supper. Still, if there was one thing more than another on which he was dependent for comfort and peace of mind, it was a quiet smoke. And now, as he settled himself down to his accustomed luxury, he could not help regretting, as he had often done before, that Roger did not join him in it.

"It's to no use offering you a pipe, I know," said he, puffing cautiously, to get his own alight, "or else I don't like to see you sitting there without one, if it was nobbut to keep me company."

"I'm obliged to you all the same," said Roger, "but if you did offer me one I shouldn't take it. I haven't smoked a pipe this twenty years or more."

"What, didn't it agree wi' you?" asked the miller. "There's some folk as bacca doesn't agree with. Mebby you'd be able to take to it again

now, if you was to try. I would, if I was you. It couldn't do you a deal o' harm trying."

"Nay," said Roger, "it isn't that; but you see, when I gave up bacca I promised the Lord faithful as I wouldn't take to it again, an' I aren't agoing to break my word now, when I've kep' it so long."

"But what for should you ha' given it up?" urged the miller. "There's no harm as I can see in a quiet smoke."

"No more there is, not to some folk," returned Roger; "but there would be to me, leastways there was when I gave it up. You see it had gotten that hold o' me, while I couldn't be easy without I'd my pipe in my mouth. An' Marget, she were sadly putten about wi' it. She begged an' better begged that I wouldn't smoke constant the way I did, but just take it now an' again, an' have done with it."

"An' she was in the right on it," observed the miller; "a man doesn't know what it is to enjoy his pipe, if he never has it out of his mouth. I never takes mine without I can give my mind to it and have it comfortable."

"Well, you'd ha' thought it was a easy thing to break yourself of," resumed Roger, "but it beat me to do it. More I smoked an' more I wanted to, an' more I tried to leave off an' more I couldn't. I got that aggravated to think I should be such a slave to that four inch o' clay, while I hated the very sight o' my pipe, an' yet I couldn't help myself. It was t' master o' me, an' a hard master an' all. However, it were just about then as my brother John died, drownded he was, in a coal-smack bound from Newcastle to Lunnon, an' his wife, poor thing! she took on so about him while she died too, three months after, an' there was t' bairn, that's our Jessie, left an orphan."

"'So,' says Marget to me, 'we mun tak' t' bairn, Roger,' says she, 'an' do for her. The Lord's casten her upon us.' An' we did, but it come heavy just then, having another mouth to fill, an' she was a hearty little thing was Jessie. You see it was while our poor Easie was lying badly, an' what with doctor's bills, an' trade being bad just then, we'd wer work set us to make both ends meet. We pinched here, an' we pinched there,

while there seemed nowt left to pinch at, an' we kep' getting behind with it all. At last, says I to Marget, we mun try, says I, an' get Jessie into t' orphand school at Bedesby. She'll be well done to there, an' it's more now than we can do, keeping of her werselves."

"'Never,' says she; 'we'll do without summut ourselves first, but we wont grudge the bairn her bite and her sup, and her your own brother's child.' Well, I cast about in my mind what we should do. It were one evening as I were sitting by the fire afore we went to bed. So all of a sudden it come across me. Says I,—

"'I've got it.'

"An' I gave a thump wi' my hand on the arm o' my chair, while she started again.

"'Got what?' says she.

"'Why, Jessie's keep,' says I. An' wi' that I took the pipe out o' my mouth.

"'That's t' last pipe ever I shall smoke,' says I, 'and t' bacca money shall be for her.'

"I said it firm like, so as she could tell I meant it, and then I snapped the pipe i' two, and laid it on the fire.

"'Fetch the others,' says I, for you see I was determined to make a clean end of it, an' there was allays some set up in the cupboard.

"So she brought 'em. There was three on 'em, an' I snapped them all, an' put 'em along wi' t' others.

"'But there's t' bacca,' says she. 'It's a pity to waste it, an' there's a good bit left in t' box. You might as well ha' smoked it out.' She was allays careful, you see, was Marget.

"'No,' says I, 'I feel strong enough to give it up to-night. Mebby, if I wait while to-morrow, it'll get the better of me again.'

"So I just put it in after the pipes, an' then we went to bed. An' I've never had a pipe sin' then, and never mean to, though I wont say but what I'd a fight for it at first."

"Well," said the miller, puffing out a cloud of smoke, "I daresay you're in the right on it. An' I wouldn't be the man to persuade you off it, but for all that I'd be sorry to give it up myself. Next to a clear conscience an' a good wife—an' I've got both—I don't know anything that's a bigger comfort to a man than a quiet

pipe by his own fireside. It makes you feel easy all over. It's like t' grease on a cartwheel. If you've been a bit creaky it takes it all out on you."

The two men sat silent after this for awhile, Roger gazing thoughtfully into the red fire, and the miller sitting upright in his three-cornered chair, in sober enjoyment of the fragrant weed.

All this time Mrs. Leaf had been quietly clicking her needles by her husband's side, catching the sense of Roger's narration; but even while she listened to him, wrapped up in thoughts of her own, which were busily passing and repassing from Jessie to her son, and from Reuben back to Jessie again.

For a long time Mrs. Leaf had been ill at ease about Reuben. Not that he was getting in any way into doubtful habits, as young men often will who live alone without a wife to keep them straight. Neither had he failed at all in his old affection for herself. But it had been a trouble to her that he had never till now seemed to think seriously of getting himself settled in life. Her pet plan of marrying him to Miss Margery Bradshaw had been destined to disappointment. He

might have had her once if he would, Mrs. Leaf felt sure of that. But though she had secretly used every effort to further the match, and after Jessie's departure had almost begun to hope that she should in time succeed, yet Reuben had been so careless and dilatory in his wooing, if indeed he had ever really meant anything at all, that the young lady, tired perhaps of his lukewarm attentions, had disposed of herself in another direction, and handed over to Ralph Burton's eldest son, what Mrs. Leaf had so coveted for her own.

Yet anxious as Mrs. Leaf had been that Reuben should take to himself a wife of her choosing, it was a sore trouble to her just now that he seemed likely at length to take one of his own. Not that she would have cared if his choice had fallen upon a suitable person, but these two daughters of Sir John Clarke's bailiff were such bold, forward girls, and it was with the eldest of them she was afraid that Reuben was taking up now. They were down a deal at his place, errands from their father they pretended; but Mrs. Leaf knew better than that. At the Christmas ball given by Sir John to his tenantry,

Reuben had danced three times with this Miss Julia. And dressed she was, as Mrs. Bradshaw, who was there, had told her, in a way to make you blush to look at her.

Mrs. Leaf had taxed her son roundly once with being "sweet" on the young lady, but he had only laughed and said that if a good-looking girl chose to make love to him, he could not help it. Yet the very next week he had gone with her to the Bedesby Flower-show, and there they were, both of them, as Mrs. Leaf said to her husband at night, almost with tears in her eyes, "with them impident round hats on, an' their hair dragged off their faces, an' their jackets with pockets outside, an' stand-up collars, an' men's neckties, and their gowns kilted up over their crinolines, a shame to be seen; an' talking an' laughing too," she said, "while you might hear them a hundred yards away."

No wonder poor Mrs. Leaf was distressed that, as she said, a son of hers should be entrapped into marrying such a forward baggage as either of those girls. So that she caught eagerly at the prospect of Jessie Lee's return, fondly hoping

that Reuben might then be lured back to his former love.

Her old objections to the niece of Roger Lee had dwindled down to nothing now. Anything to save her son from such a fate as was in store for him, if he had the misfortune to be tied to such a wife as Miss Julia Stabler could not fail to make. But though Roger's assurance that Jessie was really returning, opened a door of hope to her, yet there were other things to be taken into consideration. Jessie herself might not be disposed now to listen to Reuben's suit, even if he should return again to his old liking for her. And could there be, she thought, any covert meaning in Roger's allusion to her leaving them once more for a home of her own?

Mrs. Leaf longed to know, though she would not suffer herself to betray any undue curiosity upon the subject. She sat quiet, therefore, turning over the probability in her mind, and inwardly resolved to go down herself the next day and see Marget. It was a long time, to be sure, since she had done so; but she could take her one of her first cream-

cheeses, and make as though she wanted her receipt for raspberry-vinegar. Marget always had such beautiful raspberry-vinegar. And then Mrs. Leaf meant to bring the conversation round so as in some way to satisfy her doubt.

"You can tell your Missis, Mr. Lee," she said, as Roger got upon his legs to go, "that I'd had thoughts o' stepping down to your place to-morrow if it hold up fine. I haven't seen her, I don't know when, without it be o' Sundays, nor old Mrs. Grant neither. It's a spare day with me is Thursday, so I'll just come round and see 'em both. Will she be at home, think you?"

"Ay, she's sure to be that. She's a keeper at home is our Marget, if ever any woman was. There's nowt goes wrong there for want of her being in to see after it. She'll be main glad to see you. It's long sin' you've been down our way. I'm thinking the master an' me has it all between wersels."

"She's close, is Marget Lee," said Mrs. Leaf to her husband, as they turned back together to the house after seeing Roger to the gate; "an' I don't say but what I think she's held herself a

bit over-stiff of late, considering. But for all that, if I could find out about Jessie, an' if I were sure Reuben would take up with her again, I wouldn't mind saying as much to her, as that I'd be agreeable for them to make a match of it. I could do it easy without letting on as I were taken up with it particular myself."

"Thee should ha' done that long ago," said the miller, who was not without an inkling of some of the causes that had hurried Jessie away so suddenly from Marton. "Mebby there's others has changed their minds by now beside thee. I doubt July Stabler's gotten that hold o' Reuben that she'll be none so easy shook off. She's a deep un, is that girl, for all she talks so free. However, it's to no use meeting troubles half-way. Wait a bit, an' they'll mebby turn down some sideway afore ever they get up to you. But come thy ways in now. We're late. It's nigh upon ten. Roger Lee's had a long sit to-night, an' we've got to be stirring i' good time to-morrow. There's the men coming from Bedesby to see after that bit o' bad flooring i' the mill."

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE RECTORY.

THERE is an old saying, not without a certain truth of its own, to the effect that it never rains but it pours. No sooner had Mr. Holdych begun by his frequent visits to enliven the still monotony of life at the Priory House, bringing as it were into its quiet precincts, a breeze of fresh air from the outside world, that stirred it up to a pleasant sense of interest and animation, than Janet had the happiness of welcoming back to Marton her long-absent friends, Alison Birney and the Canon.

The soft southern air had done wonders for Alison. Janet hardly recognised her at first, so was she changed from the wan, wasted invalid who had gone away the autumn before. Yet there was

an undertone of languor in the clear bright accents, and an unwonted brilliancy in the loving eyes, that, if Janet had understood their meaning, might have warned her still to hold her friend with a trembling hand.

Happily, however, she was too unskilled in these doubtful omens to feel conscious of anything that might mar the pleasure of this first meeting after their long separation. She held Alison's hand as though she would never unloose it, rejoiced to be able once more to convey the full meaning of all that she had never quite succeeded in putting into words, even in those little sentences of fond remembrance, with which, like a caress, she always ended the letters that had found their way so often into Alison's possession during her long residence abroad.

It was always a pleasure to Alison to see Janet's handwriting outside the thin foreign paper envelope. She was sure to get a waft of real Marton air when she opened it, a full account of all that was transpiring there, and even in that quiet corner of the world something was always going on that she would care to hear.

None but those who have been long banished from their homes, unwilling exiles in a foreign land, can know how eagerly the postman's visits are expected, or with what interest the slightest details are invested that relate to the old familiar life, so dear now that it has to be looked upon from a distance.

It was worth anything to Alison, having such a correspondent in Marton as Janet. For there was such a delicious fragrance of home in all her letters. They came so warm and fresh from the writer's hand, always telling exactly what she wished to know. They gossipped so pleasantly of what was going on in the village, or told tenderly of the quiet tragedies, which from time to time were played out on even that secluded stage. For the touch of sorrow reaches through homespun and fustian, as well as through broadcloth and cambric. In that country churchyard mothers and old men laid their dead. Young men, crossed in love, went heavily behind their ploughs as they guided them along the brown fallows by the side of the Lyme. There were sore hearts among the stout-armed, red-cheeked lasses who served in the farmhouses

round about, and among the tidy wives who made a clean fireside, and waited long for the husbands returning late from the Bedesby Market.

And wherever there was trouble Janet was pretty sure to be made acquainted with it, as she went about among the people. For every one knew that "Mrs. Clyde, bless her, would listen to 'em patient, and have summut to say as would make one feel the better for hearing of it."

She had lighter matters, too, to discourse of. Stories of Christmas festivities, of Yule gatherings and New Year's bounties; of weddings that were to be, and weddings that had been; of christenings and housewarmings; of how Widow Teale's sailor son had come home at last, and how Michael Bray's wig had tumbled off one morning in church as the old man's head nodded lower than usual, while he was taking his customary snore during sermon-time.

And everything that Janet touched upon grew bright and gay, pranked out in the garb wherewith her playful fancy had invested it: for she had a way of describing things that would have made even a stranger interested in the doings of these

simple villagers; how much more Alison, whose thoughts were always wandering towards her Marton home and the people among whom she had gone in and out since childhood!

Yet even the fullest letters leave much unsaid, and Janet had still a hundred things to tell when Alison returned. She went up to the Rectory the day the travellers were expected back, to be in readiness to greet them on their arrival, and to put a finishing hand to the various little preparations for their reception. She went through the rooms, moving, just a little, lounges, chairs, and tables from the formal propriety of their position—Penelope was wonderfully precise in all her ways and giving to everything that air of graceful negligence so grateful to the artistic eye. She looped the filmy curtains in the drawing-room into more careless folds, and gave a statelier sweep to the heavy hangings in the Canon's library. She drew Alison's favourite chair to the spot whence she could look out most pleasantly across the Rectory garden, over the low holly hedge, to the grey tower of the church and the tall elms in the churchyard where the rooks were busy now fly-

ing in and out of their untidy nests, bringing incessant supplies of grubs and worms to supply the wants of their voracious young, and keeping up all the while a ceaseless cawing, which, harsh and rusty as were their sweetest notes, Alison always declared was the sound, next to the chiming of the church bells, that she loved best to hear.

And every room, too, Janet made bright with flowers. Not hothouse flowers, though Syms, the Canon's gardener, jealous as he commonly was of his floral treasures—looking on with ill-concealed distress when even Miss Alison herself ventured to possess herself of some which she thought might well be spared—had on this occasion generously placed them all at her disposal.

Janet took a few, not to hurt the feelings of the old man, and then gathered a handful of feathery reeds and bending grasses from the river's brink. These she put into a slender vase of Bohemian glass, with a single purple iris and some drooping clusters of snow-white lilies. Another she filled with fresh vine-leaves and light sprays of jessamine, with roses crimson, white,

and blush peeping out here and there, half-hidden among the green shadowing leaves.

In Alison's room she put wild flowers only. She knew how she would delight to see around her once more her woodland favourites. So she brought these broad fronds of branching fern, and smaller ones whose tiny leaflets might have been pencilled by a fairy's fingers. And among these she put store of wild hyacinths, with here and there a late-lingering primrose nestling amid the purple bells. There were tresses of the scented meadow-grass, blue-eyed forget-me-nots, and bunches of golden cowslips, the pale primula with its trefoiled leaves, and the crimson spires of the wild orchis. Every nook and corner of the Marton woods Janet knew, and where the wild-flowers grew the finest, there she had gathered them, with Alison in her thoughts, as she came through it that afternoon on her way to the Rectory.

And well she was rewarded for all her pleasant toil, when at last the sound of distant wheels was heard. And then through the garden gates which Syms had long ago set open to be in

readiness for its coming, the carriage drove up the gravelled sweep before the house, and Alison sprang out, her face all radiant with smiles.

"Oh, Janet," she said, when she was fairly landed on the porch steps, "I do think it is worth all the trouble of going from home, just to have the pleasure of coming back again."

"And almost worth parting with you," returned Janet, "to have you come home at last, looking so well. One would think you had taken a new lease of life since you went away."

"Ah, I knew you would think so," said the Canon, as he took Alison's plaid out of the carriage. "We are going to have her quite strong again. She can walk now as far as I can myself. So much, you see, for mountain air and Mediterranean breezes."

There was a ring of gladness in the Canon's voice. Alison was his only child, and the old man's heart was tightly wound around his darling. No wonder he caught eagerly at Janet's words, strengthening by them his own belief in the new hold on life which Alison had gained during their long residence abroad.

"But come, child, get off this travelling gear, and let me see you rest awhile. We must take care of you still. You were terribly tired before you got to your journey's end."

"Oh, but, papa, indeed I am not tired now in the least," exclaimed Alison, gaily. "Seeing the old place again has been the best rest I could have had. I shall be glad to get off this dusty dress, though. This is the trunk, Penelope; just take it upstairs and get it unpacked, will you? The things I want are all on the top. I put them there to be ready at once. My plaid, papa, and the travelling case—I will take them, please."

And with a light step she followed Janet to her room, where we may leave the two ladies for awhile, unpacking, dressing, recounting the incidents of the journey, and telling over the various events that during the past few months had fallen out in the little Marton world.

They were deep in their conference, and Janet was settling the last brown braid in Alison's soft hair, when an hour afterwards, Penelope knocked at the door, with the announcement that the Canon was waiting dinner.

Janet started.

"It never can be so late," she exclaimed. "It hardly seems ten minutes since we came upstairs. Stay, Alison, let me lay this braid straight. Ah, my darling," she said, as she smoothed down the fair hair with a soft caressing hand; "how pleasant it is to have you once again! Marton has seemed half empty while you have been away. I did not think the old place could have felt so dull."

"You will spoil me, Janet, if you do not mind," laughed Alison. "You are as bad as papa. I tell him sometimes that I shall have to learn to be a little cross, just a little, to keep him from thinking so much about me."

"You cross, Alison!" cried Janet, looking into the gentle eyes, and at the smooth open brow which seemed as if it could never have known the contraction of a frown. "It would be of no use your trying. I don't believe you ever knew what it was to feel angry in your life."

"Indeed, you are mistaken," said Alison, in her quiet way. "I was terribly passionate when

I was a child. It was my great fault. I had to fight hard before I learned to rein-in my temper and be silent when I could not speak pleasantly."

"Were you really?" said Janet, earnestly. "Do you know, I am almost glad to hear you say so. I used to think there was not so very much merit in your being good, though I loved you none the less for it. I fancied, you know, that you had had so little to contend against, that it was so much easier to you to do right than to other people."

"Ah, Janet," returned Alison, with a smile; "it is well we can none of us read all the secrets of another's heart. There would be few, I am afraid, to whom we should be able to give either love or reverence, if we could. But let us go down now. Papa will be tired of waiting, and I am beginning to be rather hungry myself, too. I had only some early strawberries for luncheon, and one can't make a very substantial meal off them."

"That is a new confession, Alison, for you to be hungry," exclaimed Janet. "It must cer-

tainly be an improvement. You never used to be ready for dinner before you went away. You were always rather sorry than otherwise to have to come to it. I shall grow quite reconciled to having had to part with you, only mind you don't degenerate now you have got back again."

## CHAPTER XVI.

### TABLE TALK.

"WHAT have you two been about all this time?" said the Canon, as they entered the dining-room, where the covers were already on the table, "I thought you had been lost."

"Pray forgive us, papa," said Alison, as she seated herself at the table in her old accustomed place; "Janet has been telling me all the news. We have really had a great deal to talk about, so you must excuse our late appearance. We had hardly got fairly afloat when Penelope came to call us, and our conversation was so very interesting. Shall I send you some soup? I hope it is not quite cold."

"It was my fault," said Janet, as Alison

poured out a steaming ladleful into the plate. "I am afraid I hindered her sadly."

"Well, well," said the Canon, with a smile, "I forgive you both on one condition, that I hear it all over again myself. But you have kept us so well posted-up in the Marton news, Janet, I should have thought there had been hardly anything left to tell. Your letters have been perfect chronicles of village events. By-the-bye, do you see much of our new squire? You have not mentioned him so often as his importance deserves. I regretted very much being away when he came to the Hall. He is intending to reside at it, I suppose?"

"I believe so," answered Janet; "at all events, he is making great improvements, and speaks, too, as if he were going to remain. I hardly fancy, though, that he meant to do so before he came. Perhaps he likes Marton better than he expected. There was a gentleman came, not long after the old squire died, to see over the place, and people did say that it was going to be let, but whether it was true or not, I cannot tell."

"I should have been very sorry if it had been

so," said the Canon. "It is a great disadvantage to a place where the owner of an estate does not reside upon his property. Things get neglected, and the people grow slipshod and indifferent. They don't take pride in their houses or care about keeping their bits of gardens tight and trim, and then carelessness slides in unawares into all their ways. The poor are like children. They need some one to look up to, to be a head for them. They don't do to be left entirely to themselves."

"But, papa," interposed Alison, "the Marton people have not been left entirely to themselves. You have been a sort of head to them yourself. They all come to you for advice and help in their wants and difficulties, whatever they may be."

"Yes, yes," replied the Canon, "but they want a temporal head as well. The rector cannot do his own work and that of the squire in addition. There has been a deadening influence creeping outwards from the empty Hall for the last thirty years. You may trace it through the whole village. This Mr. Holdych goes a good deal

among the people, does he not?" added he, addressing Janet.

"Oh, yes, he is going round to all the tenants on the estate. You would be amused to hear them talk about him. He manages to make them feel so thoroughly at ease with them. I do believe some of them feel raised already in the social scale because the new squire has sat down in their houses. The only complainant I have heard was old Silas Thompson. He said the squire had been to see him, and talked to him about his house as free as anything. But he made no count of it himself, for he heard that he did just the same to everybody else."

"Human nature, you see," said the Canon. "The same feeling in its passive form, working in old Silas, that urged forth Cæsar and Alexander to their conquests, and made even poor Bottom anxious to attract attention by his roaring. It is wonderful how with all the difference in men's characters, the great root-feelings remain the same in every age and country. Homer's and Shakspeare's men and women were nowise different, except in speech and dress and suchlike

outward matters, from the ploughmen and farmers and ladies and gentlemen living here in Marton now."

"I remember," said Janet, "a long time ago, I always thought of Shakspeare's people as of real persons, and seemed to know them, too, far better than those among whom I was living. I used to choose which of them I would like best to have for my friends. I was sure I should know them if I were to meet with them anywhere."

"And who was your favourite?" asked Alison, laughing.

"Oh, I was not very constant. I used to change them according to the mood I was in, and the sort of companionship I wanted. It was Rosalind for a long time. Many a long talk I have had with her as I sat in the wood or by the river side. And then it was Cordelia, and once it was Macbeth. I used so to wish Lady Macbeth had not been his wife. He would never have killed the old king then."

"They have his grave in Scotland," said the Canon. "I saw it once as I was driving along a lonely unfrequented road in a desolate moorland

region in Perthshire. Just a shapeless slab of lichen-stained rock lying at the foot of the heather-covered hills. Nothing to tell you that he who at the dead king's side had once murdered sleep now lay there resting quietly enough. Yet there was a grandeur in that block of grey granite that one misses in half the elaborate monuments in our abbeys and cathedrals."

"I should like to see it," said Janet. "Poor Macbeth! It seemed hard he should have been so sorely tempted when he was not able to resist. Destiny was too strong for him."

"Janet, Janet, you are treading on dangerous ground. Macbeth surrendered to circumstances, not because they were too strong against him, but because he was not true to himself. His own will was the traitor that let in the enemy by the postern-gate. He would never have been conquered if there had not been treachery within. You see the same thing going on everywhere. The little lad standing on the chair against the open cupboard. Such good things as there are within, such stores of red-cheeked apples, such plenitude of nuts! That is his combat with

circumstances. Sometimes he stands the siege. Sometimes, he too, runs down from the battlements and lets in the enemy himself. Duncan's crown was no greater temptation to Macbeth than the big apple is to him, yet you would not say he was unable to get down from the chair and run away instead of taking it."

"Certainly not," answered Janet. "Nevertheless, I am sorry for poor Macbeth. I wish he had had a better woman for his wife: he might have been then a better man himself."

The Canon did not pursue the subject. Perhaps he thought these metaphysical difficulties too tough to be discussed together with duck and green peas. Perhaps that Janet, being a woman, would remain of just the same opinion though he carried on the argument till the end of the third course. Alison brought back the conversation from the fall of the Scottish thane to the doings of the Marton squire.

"Is Mr. Holdych going to rebuild the end of the Hall that was burnt?" she asked.

"I believe not," said Janet. "All vestiges of the fire have been removed. You would never

guess now that anything had happened, but I do not think he intends to do anything further. They are fitting up what used to be the billiard-room for a drawing-room. It is small, but you have no idea how exquisite it is—or at least promises to be when it is finished; only I think it is almost too dark for a drawing-room. It is all deep blue, walnut, and gold. But then that is a matter of taste, and perhaps if it had been more delicate it would not have harmonized so well with the other rooms. It is the only one that is being altered. Everything else is being left just as it was."

"I can hardly imagine what the place will look like, now that it is inhabited," said Alison. "I never remember its being anything but empty and deserted. It must have been very soon after I was born that the family went away, and it has been closed, you know, ever since."

"It is seven and twenty years ago. Marget Lee was telling me about it one day before Mr. Holdych came back. She was so delighted at the thought of seeing him again, but I do believe, poor woman! she was half disappointed to find

that he had turned into a grown man, instead of being the little fellow she used to nurse before he went away."

"There is great tenacity of affection in Marget Lee," observed the Canon. "You may often notice it in those quiet, undemonstrative women. Their feelings do not fly off in vapour like those of more volatile natures. There is genuine refinement, too, of mind in Marget, more than in many people much superior in station. I have been struck sometimes by the fineness of her perceptions—the elegance, you might almost say, of some of her thoughts."

"So have I," said Janet. "I never feel, when I go to see Marget, as if I were talking to the wife of a working man just for the sake of kindness. It is real society. I enjoy a conversation with her for its own sake."

"And why not?" said Alison. "It is not mental cultivation only that you want in society. It is that of the heart, and you may find just as much of this among the poor as among the rich, besides a greater simplicity and transparency, which makes it easier for you to get close to

them, as it were. I always think myself it is a disadvantage to a lady to have had little opportunity of associating familiarly with the poor—she is deprived of a great means of education. Don't you think so, papa?"

"Indeed I do," replied the Canon. "I would always encourage young people to keep up a kindly intercourse with the poor around them. They will reap the benefit of it themselves in a fuller knowledge of human nature than they could otherwise obtain—women especially, for their lives are, in many respects, of necessity so conventional, that this mode of enlarging their sphere of observation is really valuable. We may learn something from everyone—no matter who—with whom we put ourselves into friendly relations. Nothing comes amiss, if you have but the faculty to take it up and use it."

"We missed our poor people sadly at first when we went abroad," said Alison. "However, we got quite a circle of humble acquaintances round us, after a while. I do assure you, Janet, we became quite popular. We had some most affecting partings when we came away. I did not think I

could have been so sorry to leave a place that I had felt so much regret in going to. It had really become a sort of home."

"You see, Alison," said Janet, "you are one of those happy people who can make a home anywhere; that is, wherever there are people to be kind to, or sad hearts that would be the better for a little comfort; and you may find those everywhere. I always think you would make such a good Sister of Mercy."

"She is one already," said the Canon, "except that she dispenses with the flapping caps, and wears a little, just a little, crinoline, and that is forbidden, I believe, in the Sisters' rules."

"Nonsense!" cried Janet, laughing.

"I beg your pardon," returned the Canon. "You will find it among other things that are bidden or forbidden in the rules of one Sisterhood, at least. I had a copy of them sent to me from London. I could find it, I dare say, if you are sceptical. I have it somewhere among my papers."

"Now, papa," said Alison, "I shall not let you laugh at these poor Sisters. You know you

say yourself that there is a great deal of good, not only in the work they do, but in their associating themselves together to do it."

"There is, child, there is, and I wish there were more of them in every town in England. I believe they enable many a solitary single woman to put to a good use that active love which is almost an instinct of her nature, and which must either be in some way expended or become a source of misery to herself and others."

"But she could do it without belonging to a Sisterhood," urged Janet.

"So she could; and yet when a woman is so lonely in this world as to have no near kindred of her own that she can shelter and warm herself among, it is well perhaps to be bound up in this way with others like herself. There is a wonderful stimulus and strength to be found in association with others—protection and solace, too, and, poor souls! they must need it, many of them."

"But they need not wear those dreadful dresses and flapping caps just like bathing-women, with white pinafores tied upon their heads."

"Why not," returned the Canon, "since it pleases them to do so? If they feel that their peculiar garb sets them the more distinctly apart to the work of their office, by all means let them wear it. It is their badge, and there is a great virtue in badges of all kinds. Would the soldier fight as well for his country, think you, without his British uniform, or the clergyman be listened to as attentively if he preached in his study-coat and a coloured necktie? Don't you suppose, too, that we Church dignitaries feel ourselves ten times greater men when we get all our fine things on, and walk in a row behind the vergers at Bedesby Minster, with all the people looking at us, than when we go about the streets dressed in plain broad-cloth just like ordinary mortals? No, no, Janet, we will not quarrel with the poor Sisters for wearing their serge gowns and spectral caps. There is a principle in it, deeper than feminine vanity or love of display, though possibly these may creep in unawares sometimes."

"Just as it creeps in unawares when you get on your ample surplice and your crimson hood," said Alison, with a laughing light in her soft eyes.

"Precisely," replied the Canon, with a humorous gravity. "That is my weak point, I am sorry to say; and you see I am not above making confession of it either."

"You may confess it very safely," said Janet, laughing at the bare idea. "You know very well you will find no one to believe you. But what a pity you were not here a month ago; you would have had such a delightful opportunity for display."

"Where was that?"

"At the great choral gathering we had at the Cathedral. I told you about it, did I not?"

"You said in one of your letters that there was to be one, but that was all. You went to it, then?"

"Oh, certainly; and a magnificent sight it was —such, I should think, as is seldom seen at any Protestant service. I could hardly have believed that our plain English ritual could have been rendered so imposing. You should have heard, Alison, those thousand voices full and sweet. It was like the sound of many waters, not loud or overpowering, but as if one mighty wave of har-

mony flowed softly everywhere. And then the old Minster looked so grand. It was a sort of beauty that sank in. I felt as if I could never look or listen enough—only, you know, there was not much worship in it all, except that it seemed to smooth you down; everything was in such perfect harmony."

"I wish I had been there," said Alison, rising from the table. "Shall we leave you now, papa? I must get my shawl, and just go round the garden once with Janet. I promise you I will not stay out long. I will come back in a quarter of an hour and show myself—if you are not asleep, that is," she added, as she and Janet went gaily away together.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE PICTURE ON THE WALL.

IF there was one time more than another when Mr. Holdych used to feel the quietude of Marton Hall a little dull, it was when he sat down in state to his solitary dinner.

Breakfast was beguiled by the perusal of his letters and papers. Indeed, like most men, he enjoyed, rather than otherwise, the opportunity of getting comfortably through his correspondence undisturbed by the exclamations and remarks of others. Luncheon was a mere parenthesis in the business of the day, but dinner, as in all well-regulated households, was a solemn and a ponderous undertaking. It could not be got through in easy, slipshod fashion, in dressing-gown and

slippers, with the table littered over with things foreign to the subject-matter of the business in hand. It behoved him to address himself to it seriously, if only to avoids hocking the propriety of the tall footman who stood behind his chair, a silent, though not, alas! an unobservant spectator of the manner in which he fulfilled his duties.

True, he could ask some one to come and dine with him. There were plenty of people in the neighbourhood who would be only too happy to accept his invitations if he chose to give them; but then this would involve the necessity of entertaining his guests the evening through in his capacity of host, and this was a price which he was hardly disposed to pay for the gratification of dining in company. It would be a greater bore, he reflected, to be obliged to continue talking when he was no longer in the mood for it, than to have to keep silence when he was inclined for conversation.

He confined himself, therefore, to the society of Pompey, the great hound to whom we have been introduced upon a former occasion, and who now, released from his post in the court-yard, had be-

come his inseparable companion. Pompey from the first had recognised the fact that Leonard was the master of Marton Hall, and at once had proffered his allegiance. The old dog was getting into years now, though he still retained his ancient dignity of demeanour. It seemed a solace to him to have found, in his old age, one with whom he might, without condescension, maintain friendly relations, and certainly if ever a dog did his best to make his company agreeable, that dog was Pompey. He could not speak, to be sure, which was a slight impediment to the freedom of his intercourse with his master; but what with his tail, his ears, and his eyes, he managed to give an animated response to anything that might be said to him in the way of remark. Still, the society of Pompey, though good as far as it went, was somewhat monotonous; besides, though a well-conducted dog, he could not of course occupy a seat at the table, being necessarily restricted to sitting, dog-wise, on his haunches upon the carpet: so that although Leonard supplied him liberally with choice morsels from his own plate, it would have been a stretch of the imagination to have

supposed that he was dining otherwise than alone.

He looked sometimes, as he came in and sat down in his place, at the long array of dishes marshalled before him, with the savoury viands awaiting his selection beneath the polished covers; at the plate and crystal, glittering in the afternoon sunlight as it streamed in upon them through the mullioned windows; at the goblets and decanters, the glasses, tall and shallow; the great épergne that towered in the centre; at the spices and sauces; the elaborate garnishings that witnessed to the taste and labour of his London cook; at the ladles and carving-knives, the gravy-spoons, dessert-spoons, and salt-spoons; at the big forks and little ones, the cruets and salt-cellars, with all the multitudinous appendages of a modern English dinner-table, and felt almost ashamed to reflect that this complicated apparatus should be brought into action for his sole behoof. Not that there was anything he could very well have dispensed with. Custom makes slaves of us all; and if there is one thing about which an Englishman is more particular than another, it is the due observance

of the rites and ceremonies attendant on the proper eating of his dinner. Still, he would have felt relieved sometimes to have had some one to share the responsibility with him.

He never lingered over the meal longer than was absolutely necessary, and always felt glad when it was over, the servants cleared out of the room, and he himself at liberty to retire, if he chose, from the scene of action, and seek some more congenial employment; or, with his feet stretched beneath the table, to lean back in his chair with his glass before him, and lifting, in imagination, the curtain from the future, to indulge, shrewd and sober as he was, in dreams and speculations on what might possibly one day be his, until he was sometimes so lost in thought, that it was not without difficulty he found his way back to the prose realities of things around him.

Leonard Holdych was a man who needed, more than most, to lead an evenly developed life. His nature was too powerful to bear repression in either one direction or another. It must have leave to expand on every side, or the cramped and stunted faculties would presently assert their

rights and painfully compel attention to their claims. And yet for years he had crushed back disdainfully, as unworthy of regard, all those gentler instincts of the heart which alone might have availed to soften and refine the rugged strength which formed the basis of his character. Still, though these might be crushed, they could not be destroyed. They had vitality enough remaining to make him sensible, at times, that there was something absent from his life without which it never could attain to full-rounded perfectness.

And day by day, since first he had seen in Marton church that quiet figure in the purple light, this sense of want unsatisfied had deepened and grown more distinct. It asserted itself; it would not be ignored; it shaped itself into a definite demand that refused to be denied. Yet there was a secret sweetness, even in this need, unfelt before. It was like a dim prophecy sounding from out of the innermost recesses of his being, vaguely telling of that abounding joy, that measureless content which one day might be his.

It is so sometimes. For years a man may go on his way, thousands of fair forms pressing him

round—some gay and bright as summer skies, others sweet and solemn as a starlight night; and yet, among them all, not one on which he cares to rest, not one which has an inner meaning that he alone may read. He passes them by, indifferent alike to all, and then, perhaps, turning suddenly some unexpected corner in life, there rises one before him which is as a revelation, discovering to him the possibilities of happiness that yet lie folded in the heart of his nature.

It was so now with Leonard. He had come to Marton to take possession of his inheritance; and already he felt that in this woman's love, if ever he might attain to call it his, was a treasure, richer far, than all the broad acres that had descended to him from his ancestors. He seemed to himself like a man possessing vast treasures shut up in a storehouse of which he had lost the key. Could it be that here was the hand which should unlock it for him, and enrich him with his own unbounded wealth?

His thoughts trembled like a woman's around this new-found source of happiness. They gathered towards it in all the pauses of his busy life.

Again and again he found himself recalling her looks, her tones, her words, the spring-like freshness of her voice and ways, the graceful suavity of her sweet fair womanhood.

Not many weeks had passed as yet since that twilight visit at the Priory House, yet to Leonard it seemed already, as though through a long lifetime he had known her. Reaching out his hand to clasp with hers, there was a strange sense of nearness, as if for the moment the currents of their two lives had met and mingled. It was new to him. Since his earliest youth he had seen but little of women except amid the blaze and glitter of the ball-room, or trammelled by the ceremonies of conventional etiquette. The sweet charities of domestic life had been utterly unknown to him. Through the whole course of his official career, a London club-house had been his only home. And club-life in London, though replete with appliances of luxury and ease, does not tend greatly to develope the finer features of the character.

Leonard had adopted it though of his own accord, from choice as much as from the force of

circumstances, and in its turn it had produced its effect upon him. Courted he was in all the circles he frequented, yet beneath the outer geniality of his manners there lay, like the bed of rock beneath the green rind of the earth, an impenetrable crust of indifference and reserve. There might be softer springs beneath: if there were, they had been long kept closely sealed.

With men he felt alone. There was free interchange of thought, many interests in common, but his spirit never flowed out towards theirs. There was always set between himself and others an invisible but impassable barrier, which allowed him to come very near, to see clearly beyond it, but never to touch. And now towards Janet a new sense seemed to have arisen, which melted down with its warm breath this wall of separation. Standing in her presence, listening to her voice, watching the aureal light that flashed and faded on her speaking face, the bounds of his being became enlarged. He felt himself flowing forth on every side, overpassing the limits of his own solitary personality, and mixing and blending his being with hers.

Strange, he thought, as he sat alone one evening in early June, after his solitary dinner, his glass of wine brimmed still, untasted for the last half-hour—strange that he upon whom a thousand blandishments had been spent in vain, should yield at once to an influence so unconsciously exerted over him. That he who had looked on woman so long as but a toy for idle hours, a graceful clog upon the wheels of society, a crafty syren or a lovely doll, should feel now as if to call this one soft hand his own he would willingly part with all beside.

Yet so it was; nay, stranger still, he was content to have it so. He would not go back if he could to that old indifference. A new light had arisen for him. Into the waters of his life once so brackish had been thrown a healing branch. What should hinder him from stooping down to drink?

He looked up. There was the laughing face in the picture on the opposite wall, the air of gay defiance still breathing from the lovely features, the finger raised as if daring him to look thus hopefully into the future. So at least he fancied

as he raised his head, and met the glance of those mocking blue eyes bent upon him as they gazed forth from the canvas.

It was like an evil omen marring his dreams. He felt impatient, irritated even, as with a living creature. His mood was thwarted, his mind disturbed. Half-dead memories were thronging back, laying their clammy hands upon his new-born hope.

"Pshaw!" he muttered to himself, "what folly to be thus ruffled by a painted face."

He rose from his seat, emptied his glass at a single draught, and putting on his hat, went out into the village to call at Roger Lee's, and give him directions about the great iron gates that opened from the garden-end of the yew-tree walk down on to the water, and which, the foundations of the pillars being now slightly sunk, hung quite crooked on their hinges.

As he passed through the hall he gave instructions to Mrs. Grant, who was standing snipping off the withered blossoms from the plants that were ranged against the walls, to have the portrait that hung in the dining-room removed. He

desired her also to replace it by another that he mentioned to her—a little woodland scene, two peasant children stooping by a brook that ran on beneath the trees, and drinking its waters out of the hollow of their hands.

Mrs. Grant curtseyed and obeyed. Half an hour later the golden beauty was banished to a corner of the great gallery that ran round the hall, and its place supplied by the sylvan scene, much to the regret of Mrs. Grant, who inwardly thought her master had made a very poor exchange, to say nothing of this one being in such a much shabbier frame than the other. But then gentlemen had their fancies, and of course if Mr. Holdych liked this the best, he was in the right of it to please himself.

It was after sunset when Leonard returned. He had found the smithy shut up when he got there, and had gone into the cottage, where he sat for some time talking to Roger and his wife, to the great gratification of the worthy pair.

Indeed, Marget said to her husband after he was gone, that there was something "unco satisfying in a crack with the squire," while Roger declared

for his part that it was as good as a Sunday dinner, any day.

The mists were already rising from the river and hanging in grey folds over the meadows that skirted its banks, creeping up, too, over the shubbery and lawn around the house, as Leonard issued from the yew-tree walk and passed over the rusty drawbridge into the gravelled inclosure beyond.

Through the uncurtained windows came the warm gleam of fires which the housekeeper had had lighted since he went out. The old mansion looked cheerful enough as its master went in ; yet crossing the threshold, he noticed, as he had done more than once before, the silence of his house, the absence of that sweet, pleasant stir in the air which the presence of living, loved inmates always causes. It should not be so much longer, he thought. He went forward into the dining-room and involuntarily looked up to the place where awhile ago had hung the laughing face.

Instead, he saw only the peaceful woodland nook, and the little rustics drinking as eagerly as ever, without the slightest reference, apparently,

to himself or his proceedings. Unconsciously he felt it a relief that the impalpable restraint which that forbidding hand had laid upon him should have been removed. The bar seemed taken away which interposed between himself and the fulfilment of his hopes. He drew forward a chair, and stretching himself in it, in front of the blazing fire, plunged into a reverie as pleasant as it was profound.

The ruddy light played over his face, casting deep shadows over the firmly-chiselled features. It brought out its granite outlines into strong relief. It lit up with a fitful radiance the broad and open brow. It crept in threads of tawny light among the loose masses of hair. What a still, locked countenance it was, beneath the changeful flickering glow. Like an iron safe, holding in its keeping so many strange records. For it wore still the intense girded look of a man who sees his foes marshalled on the field before him, but who, trusting in God and his strong right arm, will yet press on valiantly and win the day at last.

His life lay before him now. He stood, his

back to the past, face forward to the coming years. A man, with a man's hopes and plans and resolute resolves, his half-felt life thrilled through with a feeling, vivid, passionate, intense; his work around him, and before him the prize which he had set himself to win.

Gradually, as he pondered, there stole across his face an indescribable aspect of tenderness and repose, that rippled over it like a transparent wave of life. It unbent the rigid line of the lips. It drew the keen, dark eyes into an expression of infinite sweetness and longing. It smoothed the heavy folds from the forehead. It was as if some hidden radiance were issuing from within, the outcome of these unspoken thoughts.

All at once, breaking the silence, the Marton bells began to ring merrily out, their riotous clang softened by the distance into a low jubilant peal.

It was the weekly practising night of the Marton ringers. They were beginning when Leonard went out into the village, but had paused awhile, and now again were lustily returning to their task. He had heard these bells before, sounding

through the twilight across the tops of the tall fir-trees in the wood, without paying any particular regard to them. But to-night they chimed in with his mood. He listened attentively as the full rich tones rose and fell upon the air. To his fancy it seemed just then as if they were telling, in a chorus of tumultuous joy, of the fulfilment of these new-born hopes of his. There floated around him a strange sense of waiting rest, as if he heard the still footsteps of approaching angels, and felt the fragrance of the gifts from Paradise which they were bearing in their hands.

He did not pause to question with himself whether after all he might not fail to win the love which was to shed such lustre on his future path. That flood of mingled tenderness and resolve whose tidal wave filled every chamber of his heart, left no room for doubt or fear. He knew, he felt in his inmost soul assured, that the little shivering hand which six years and more ago he had held for the first time within his own, would lie in it again, soft and warm, no longer a stranger's but a wife's. Through life till death, his own—his own.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### STILL WATERS.

THE window was standing wide open, the white muslin curtains swaying softly to and fro as the morning air came in and stirred their folds. The roses outside were peeping in over the broad stone sill, and Rollo was lying on the carpet in a large patch of sunshine, sniffing the air, in which he detected signs of approaching breakfast, and waiting patiently for his mistress to make her appearance.

She came in presently, with her garden hat on, and her hand full of the roses and sprays of scented mignonette which she had just been gathering.

Janet usually went straight through the open

half-door when she came down in the morning, and took a little stroll round the garden, while the dew still lay bright and sparkling on the grass, and spangled the leaves and flowers with countless glowing gems of purple, green and gold. She was not an uncomfortably early riser. What really pleasant woman ever is? She did not fidget the maid by stumbling downstairs in the grey twilight before the front shutters were opened, or the breakfast-room swept and cleaned, and everything made as trim and fit for her reception as a well-bred servant likes to have it before her mistress comes down. She always let the day get a little aired, and then made her appearance, never less than a quarter of an hour before it was time for breakfast, looking as bright and fresh as the cluster of roses which she held just now in her hand.

For Janet was not one to despise the minor observances of the toilette, or, worse still, to slur over their morning performance, and reserve her energies for evening display. She dressed, not for others, but herself, with an instinctive taste that made her always pleasant to behold. Every-

thing that Janet wore looked graceful and becoming, so perfectly was all blended into one harmonious whole. There was nothing wanting, nothing that could be done without; nothing prim nor yet untidy; no useless bows or buttons; no stray ribbon whose discordant hue offended you like a false note in music. There was a sweet restraint in even the flowing carelessness of her loose morning dress, and an unstudied elegance in the bands of rippling hair, folded with such Grecian symmetry around her head. Truly a pleasant sight as she came in this morning, though there was but Rollo present just then to be charmed by it.

She put her flowers into a glass which she placed in the centre of the table; and then, hearing her father's step at the door, rang the bell for breakfast. Hannah came, bringing with her coffee and hot rolls, and also on a corner of the tray, a note for Mr. Brande, which a man from the Hall had that moment brought.

"It is from Mr. Holdych. He wants us to go there to-morrow to dinner."

"To-morrow!" repeated Janet, with some

surprise. It was so strange, she thought, that Mr. Holdych should invite them for the first time in such unceremonious fashion.

"Yes. It seems he was at the station at Bedesby last night, and saw there Stier the astronomer, from the Munich Observatory, who had just got in from London. He wants me—both of us indeed—to meet him. There is the note. You can read it yourself."

Janet took the note and glanced rapidly over it.

"What shall you do?" she said, looking up.

"I think I shall go. This Stier is a celebrated man. I should like to meet him, and in all probability I shall never have another opportunity."

"But, papa," said Janet, doubtfully, "you know you have not dined out anywhere for so long, not even at the Rectory; and if Alison and the Canon should be there."

"Ah, yes; I had forgotten. But then this will be very different from a formal dinner-party. Besides, the Canon is a sensible man. He will understand that naturally I should be anxious to meet a man like Stier. I think I shall go.

Remind me, Janet, that I send an answer as soon as breakfast is over."

"I daresay," said Janet, after they were seated at table, "that Mr. Holdych had been to the station to meet Mrs. Leslie, his aunt, or grand-aunt I believe she is. You know he said the other day he was expecting her this week."

"Probably," replied her father, looking up for a moment, and then returning to his coffee and the old copy of Howell's Dialling with which he was engaged.

Mr. Brande was seldom without a book in his hand at breakfast-time. It supplied the place of the daily paper, which with most gentlemen is the invariable accompaniment of their morning meal, and formed, in a general way, almost as effectual a barrier to conversation as the closely-printed columns of the *Times* or *Standard*, behind which heads of families are accustomed to entrench themselves, to the scandal and discomfiture of loquacious wives.

He was unusually absorbed to-day, for he was about constructing a dial for the Hall garden, similar to one described at large by the venerable-

looking old gentleman in a black skull-cap, whose portrait formed a frontispiece to his book; and he was just now investigating the subject with all the eagerness of a genuine mathematician. Janet saw that he did not care to be interrupted, and finished her breakfast in silence, only drawing towards her the note which lay open on the table, and amusing herself, as she waited patiently for her father to conclude his last cup of coffee, by tracing an imaginary resemblance between the firm, flowing hand and the character of the writer.

There may be truth in the theory that people do thus unconsciously convey to others the impression of their own peculiar idiosyncrasies. Possibly, too, the minds of some may be, like the iodized plates of a photographer, more than usually sensitive to these slight and subtle emanations, so that they receive clear and accurate impressions where others would be left wholly in the dark. Be that as it may, Janet found herself studying Mr. Holdych's note with a degree of interest for which she would perhaps have been puzzled to account, had she been suddenly called upon to do so. She saw a good deal in it; at all events, she

fancied she did: but then she knew what to look for; so whether she added much to her stock of information respecting the writer's character, may still remain an open question.

"Papa," said Janet, the next day, putting her head in at the door of her father's study, "are you not going to dress?"

"To dress?" repeated he, looking up in some bewilderment from the close-filled sheet of calculations spread out on the table before him.

"We are going to the Hall, you know," said Janet. "It is nearly five now, and Mr. Holdych dines at six. You will only just have time."

"Dear me! I had forgotten it completely," said Mr. Brande, stretching himself. "Five o'clock, did you say, and the day to begin over again? Don't wait, Janet. I am coming directly."

And with these words he took a fresh drop of ink into the pen he held in his hand.

"But, papa," said Janet, who knew by experience what her father's "directly" usually meant, "you have really no time to spare, and it is so disagreeable to keep anyone's dinner

waiting. The first time, too, that we have been there."

And with a half-playful decision, to which Mr. Brande was pretty well accustomed in matters like this, and to which, to do him justice, he usually submitted without demur, she took his pen out of his hand, and laid it in the old bronze standish that stood half-buried among the heaps of miscellaneous litter that covered the table.

"Take care, Janet!" he exclaimed, in a tone of dismay; "you are disarranging all my papers."

But already Janet had laid them neatly together, and was putting them straight inside the curious old cabinet.

"I have laid out everything for you in your room," she said, as her father went slowly out of the study, casting, as he did so, a lingering look at the piles of papers and the brown old folios that lay about in true literary confusion, and almost regretting the engagement which compelled him to abandon them. "If we set off at half-past five we can walk there through the wood, and then Michael can bring the pony-carriage to fetch us home."

Thanks to Janet's care, she and her father reached the Hall at the appointed time. There they found, as she had conjectured, the Canon and his daughter, who had arrived just before them.

Janet could not help a little nervous flutter as she was ushered in state through the hall and up the broad shallow staircase, and felt thankful to see Alison in the dressing-room to which she was conducted. She so seldom visited anywhere but at the Rectory, that even this little bit of sober gaiety was a thing unusual to her, and Alison's presence was a positive relief in the prospect of the evening she was about to spend.

"It seems so strange, Alison," she said, "to see the old place all alive at last. To think of our actually sitting down to dinner in that great dining-room that I used to feel almost awed to go into, so hushed and dim it always was."

"But how wonderfully everything is improved!" said Alison, as she assisted Janet to adjust the bands of her brown hair, which had got somewhat disarranged during their walk. "I could hardly have believed it possible for Marton Hall

to have changed itself into such a pleasant place. It quite smiles upon you now, as if it felt happy again, instead of distressing you by that hopeless, saddened look it always had before. How pretty this green spray of Hecuba is, Janet! I like it better in your hair than flowers. Stay, let me loosen out this leaf a little. That is better. Do you know?" she said, as she gave a final glance to see that all was right, "I really think you have grown brighter too yourself, somehow. There is certainly more sunshine in your face than there was before I went away. How is it?"

"I do not know," laughed Janet; "unless it be the reflection from yours. But shall we go down now? I am so glad you are here. You must let me shelter behind you. I know you will laugh at me, but I feel half timid at even this little affair. I wish I could be like you, and feel just the same wherever I am."

Alison answered with a smile, and drawing Janet's arm within her own, as if to promise her the protection sought, went down with her to the drawing-room.

Janet found herself, after all, at her ease the

moment she entered the room. Mr. Holdych came forward and introduced them both to Mrs. Leslie, his aunt, a placid fair old lady with that air of sweet serenity that often gathers around a quiet old age. Directly afterwards dinner was announced, and the Canon took Janet under his wing, and escorted her to the dining-room.

When Mr. Holdych did ask people to dinner, he gave his mind to it and did it effectually. What champagne and claret are to gooseberry wine and ginger-pop, that his entertainments were to the dismal penance usually inflicted by hosts upon their guests, under pretence of performing the rites of hospitality. Janet, for her part, thought that nothing could be more delightful than to listen to, and by-and-by join in, the bright sparkling talk that was flashing around her. Such graceful badinage, such keen clear railery, such sensible nonsense, collecting by degrees into a steadier stream as the lighter froth cleared itself away, and left the conversation flowing on in a more definite channel. Only Mr. Brande and the astronomer, who were seated together, had retired into a private discussion on

something of apparently absorbing interest, judging, at least, by their slight and intermittent attention to the creature comforts spread before them in such choice profusion.

Janet could willingly have sat all the evening, listening to the conversation in which now Mr. Holdych and the Canon were bearing the chief share. She felt quite sorry when Mrs. Leslie, who was getting a little tired, gave the signal to retire. She rose, therefore, and leaving the gentlemen to carry on the subject over their wine, accompanied the old lady and Alison into the drawing-room.

The sun was still shining into the room when they entered, shimmering through the tall acacias that stood in the west window, lying in long level lines upon the thick piled carpet, and lighting up with a soft lustrous glimmer the golden tracery on the walls, and the rich carving on the cornices and panelling. The glass doors at the lower end of the room stood open, admitting the evening breeze, which crept softly in, betraying by its scent the perfumed kisses it had stolen on its way, from the tangled masses of

white starred jessamine that trailed across the outer walls.

"How delicious that jessamine is! I must really have a bit," exclaimed Alison, going through the open door and gathering two or three of the delicate sprays. "I do believe," she said, as she returned, "the Marton jessamine is more sweet by half than that which grows anywhere else."

Mrs. Leslie smiled as Alison came forward, bringing her one of the sprays.

"I have a great affection for the jessamine," she added, "it is my favourite flower."

"And why should you choose it before all the garden beauties?" asked the old lady, as she took Alison's proffered gift.

"Because it leads such a quiet, fragrant life. It is so graceful and simple, so pure and gentle, so exactly my ideal of all that woman ought to be."

"It is just like yourself, Alison," said Janet; "there must be a sort of affinity between you and it, and so that makes you prefer it to other flowers. Don't you think so, Mrs. Leslie?"

But Alison prevented the answer which was on the old lady's lips.

"You look tired, Mrs. Leslie. I daresay you are accustomed to rest a little after dinner? Let me put you into this easy-chair; it is more comfortable than the one you are in."

"Thank you, my dear; but you are tempting me to be very unsociable. I am afraid I shall fall asleep if I sit here long, I am never fit for much after dinner until I have had a few minutes' rest."

"Then, pray do not let our presence prevent you from taking it," said Alison, drawing forward a footstool as she spoke, and placing it beneath the old lady's feet, with a sweet reverential courtesy, and that exquisite grace which characterized all she did. "If you will excuse us a little while, Mrs. Clyde and I will take a stroll in the garden. I have not seen it since the alterations were made."

"Nay, nay," said Mrs. Leslie, "I did not mean to banish you. I shall not hear your conversation, if you will not mind my not joining in it myself at present. But I will not

keep you here if you would really like to go. Thank you, my dear," she added, turning to Janet, who was arranging a cushion behind her head. "You will spoil me, I am afraid, by so many attentions. I am not accustomed, you know, to have young hands like yours waiting upon me."

"You live quite alone," said Janet softly, "Mr. Holdych told us so."

"Yes," said the old lady, folding her hands together. "I have outlived all my early friends, and have lost all my children and all my kindred except Leonard. Those who have no relations of their own grow very lonely as they grow old."

Janet looked down into the withered face whose only expression was that of patient peace, and wondered what it must be to feel life so still, to have exchanged the rushing health, the supple form, the fresh fair beauty of youth, for the wan and wrinkled face and trembling hand of age—wondered, too, whether her heart would ever learn to beat so quietly, and whether when this life, with all its joy and gladness, its grief and toil, lay like a travelled road behind her, and

there remained no longer any future but that of eternity, she, too, would stand in the calm twilight of existence waiting thus patiently, until the true day should dawn.

Perhaps some of her thoughts told themselves in her face, for the old lady took in her own the hand that was resting on the arm of the chair, and raising her dim, kind eyes to Janet's, said—

"My child, old age takes from us many of our joys, but remember that though we may outlive happiness, we need never outlive peace."

She spoke in a very quiet, even voice, the voice of one who has parted one by one with the possessions that make life precious, and stands now amid the evening shadows, content to know that God will presently give back to her in eternity, all that He has taken away in time. Then she laid Janet's hand out of hers, and leaning her head upon the cushion, closed her eyes as if she were composing herself to rest.

Janet gave another look at the placid countenance, and then joined Alison, who was standing on the steps leading down into the garden, watching the fountain on the lawn below, as it leaped up into

the sunshine, catching on its topmost jets the rosy light that now was partially shut out by a belt of tall evergreens beyond. She put her arm within Janet's, and the two stepped out into the garden.

They paced along side by side for a little while in silence, just enjoying the dreamy, hazy peacefulness of the quiet evening hour, and the summer warmth that lingered in the air now that the heat of the day was over. There was no restraint in their friendship; they could avail themselves when they pleased of the blessed privilege of silence, without any uneasy feeling of mutual embarrassment creeping in to mar their pleasure. And now they sauntered along the smooth gravelled pathway, not caring to talk, yet each feeling an added enjoyment from the presence of the other.

There was hardly a sound to break the quietness, except the plash of the fountain as its waters fell in a tinkling stream upon the broad dark leaves of the water-lilies in the basin. Now and then came a few sweet notes from a thrush or blackbird, singing its little ones to sleep in the

shady covert of some green sycamore or beech; and fainter still, the leafy whispering among the trees, as the summer wind swayed the waving masses of foliage. All around was the rich June life, and above them the blue stainless sky, melting into warmer tones towards the west, where pearl and crimson-coloured clouds lay motionless around the sinking sun.

It was as if Nature herself walked with hushed step beside them, bending over them with her breathing, warm caress, folding them the closer together as they felt themselves within her soft embrace.

Such times come to us every now and then, like drops of music falling into life, when for awhile we feel ourselves in tune with all around, as if the grand primeval harmony between man and nature had been at last restored, and every chord of our being were reverberating in unison with that great choral song, which, unheard by our dull mortal ears, is for ever rising from all created things.

And then nature is no longer dead to us. It grows quick and warm with life. We hear the pulsing of its mighty heart. We know, we feel,

that there is, there surely is, something behind these outward shows—some mystery unrevealed as yet, of which we know no more than only to be conscious that there is a secret waiting to be told, some hidden relations to ourselves, though what we cannot tell. Only we feel the subtle influence stealing through our senses, drawing us out of ourselves, mingling our single solitary life with that which flows around us—a passing gleam—no more, as of summer lightning on a darkened world. But when it is gone we know that all is not void, though our eyes no longer trace any outlines through the gloom.

It was some feeling such as this which, as Janet and Alison wandered slowly along, held them in a silence which yet in itself was a kind of communion. They paced on together in quiet enjoyment of each other's society, through the high, old-fashioned beech avenues, past gorgeous parterres of glowing hothouse flowers, down long leafy colonnades, through which the breezes whispered pleasantly around them. At last they sat down on the edge of the fountain, listening to the soft lapse of its waters among the lilies, and gazing

through the long green vista that stretched like a cathedral aisle before them, with its tracery-work of sheen and shadow, its floating banners of foliage, its dim soft light, and hush of sanctity and repose.

They were talking quietly together, when Janet was startled by hearing footsteps behind them, and directly afterwards two hands were laid upon her shoulders, and looking up, she saw the Canon's face.

"This is not beautiful behaviour," he said, shaking his head with a grave show of rebuke.

"Indeed, we did not know you would be back so soon. We only just came out for a few minutes, while Mrs. Leslie had a nap. We have not been here long, have we, Alison?"

"Nonsense," said the Canon. "I saw you pass the dining-room window nearly half-an-hour ago. But come in now, both of you; we want some music."

"We must try and get Mr. Holdych to sing," said Janet, rising. "I know he does, though I have never heard him. It will be quite a treat to me to listen to music. It is so long since I have heard any but my own."

"Come, Alison," urged the Canon, for Alison was lingering still, toying with a long creeper that had strayed over the fern-grown border of the fountain-pond. "It is well I came to look after you, or you might have stayed out until the dew began to fall, and you have nothing but that thin shawl over your shoulders. You forget how precious you are."

"No, indeed, papa!" exclaimed Alison, as she stood up and put her hand within her father's arm; "but it is quite too warm yet to do me any harm. The air is as soft as a baby's breath. I will not do it again, though, if you are afraid. Not even for the pleasure of being looked after," she added, with a smile, as the Canon drew her closer to himself, with an anxious care that seemed as if it would shield the fair head from even the faint waft of wind that just stirred the soft curls upon her neck.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### "WHEN THE BLOOM IS ON THE RYE."

WHEN they got back to the drawing-room, Janet found her father and Dr. Stier standing in the recess of one of the windows, engaged as deeply in conversation as they had been during their discussion at dinner. Mrs. Leslie was leaning back in the easy-chair in which they had left her, turning over the pages of a great book of photographs which Mr. Holdych, who was standing beside her, was explaining. There were portraits of most of the great statesmen of the day, of living authors, artists, and musicians, and of the ministers of the various foreign courts to which Mr. Holdych's official duties had called him. He glanced up as the two ladies, accompanied by

the Canon, stepped through the open door into the room, and then returned to his running commentary on the pictures which the old lady was examining.

"Mrs. Clyde," he said presently, looking across to Janet, who was chatting with Alison and the Canon, "you were asking me the other day about Mendelssohn. Here is the portrait that I was telling you of."

Janet came forward and knelt on a hassock by Mrs. Leslie's side, that she might see the book as it lay upon the old lady's lap.

"It is from a bust," added Mr. Holdych; "but it is an admirable likeness. It gives all of his face that could be given; but no sculptor could convey its inimitable beauty of expression."

Janet looked a good while, silently, reverently, on the faultless countenance.

"He could hardly help being good," she said at last, "with such a face as that. It is that of an angel rather than that of a man."

"There was a wonderful harmony in his character," said Leonard; "every quality was so admirably balanced. Indeed, his life seemed

meant to show to what perfection a human being may arrive. But I hardly agree with you that if he was so, it was because he could not help it. I have no doubt he made himself to a great extent what he was, just as we all do."

"But are you sure," said Janet, still looking intently on the portrait, as if she would stamp its every lineament upon her memory; "are you sure that we do make ourselves what we are? Is there not a great deal done for us before ever we begin to work ourselves?"

"In what way?" asked Leonard, who saw pretty well what her thoughts were reaching after, but chose to let her fetch it for herself.

He enjoyed these little mental sparring-matches between himself and Janet. They pleased him, after a fresh and piquant fashion. He liked to draw her out in this way, and see what it was she had laid up within her. Sometimes he would take one side for the sake of seeing what she would say upon the other, as he did just now; and Janet, who always took everything in perfect good faith, went on anxiously to explain herself.

"I mean," she said, seeing that he looked as

if he were waiting for an answer, "that we have our natures given to us, and we cannot change them to what we would. Now, some people are made of coarse clay, and some of fine; and the bit of coarse clay cannot make itself into a China cup if it try ever so. It can never turn itself into anything but a flower-pot, or a brick, or something of that sort."

"But it may make itself into a good brick, instead of a bad one," said Leonard, with a smile.

"Just so," returned Janet; "or it may remain a lump of clay without ever turning even into a brick. But still that does not alter what I meant to say. We cannot choose what sort of clay we will be made of. We just have to take our nature as it is, and if it happens to be coarse clay to begin with, and full of grit and sand, instead of being fine and soft, like Mendelssohn's, for instance——"

"Why," interrupted the Canon, who had come up to them, and was listening to the conversation, "we must just take it as it is and make the best of it. And if we cannot mould ourselves into vases of fine porcelain, let us be content to be

good bricks. The world wants them as well as China jars. And now come to the piano and let us have some music. That will be a hundred times better, just now, than metaphysics."

"But we were not talking metaphysics," said Janet, laughing, as Mr. Holdych led her across the room to the piano, where Alison was sitting turning over a pile of loose music that lay heaped upon the top of the Canterbury.

"You would have been soon," said the Canon. "In five minutes' time you would have been entangled in a perfect maze of fate and free-will, psychology and physiology, materialism and destiny. They are all involved in what you were talking about. They are indeed. You need not look so dubious. You had got upon a question which any child may ask, but which no intellect on earth can answer. It is a mercy that we may each be true to all that is best within us, without being called upon to settle it. And now let us leave Mendelssohn's mind, and have some of his music. Here are these two-part songs of his. Can you and Alison manage to sing them, do you think?"

"Will you, Alison?" asked Janet; "you are not afraid of trying your voice, are you?"

"Oh, no; a little singing does me no harm now; though I never do very much at once. Which shall we have? Have you any favourite among them, Mr. Holdych? But they are all so beautiful that it is difficult to choose."

"Suppose you begin at the beginning, and sing them through," said Leonard.

"No, indeed! That would be too unreasonable by half," returned Alison, laughing. "Shall we have this one, Janet?—'Greeting.' I know you like it. Will you play the accompaniment? You know it so much better than I do," she added, as she placed the book open on the desk of the piano.

Janet seated herself and began to play. Mr. Holdych stood behind them, the Canon threw himself into a chair close by, and prepared to listen at his ease. Of all the minor luxuries of life, this was what the Canon delighted in the most. One reason why he was able to work his mind almost incessantly, as with a hundred horse-power, and still retain his energies both physical and mental, unimpaired, was that he possessed

the rare faculty of unbending thoroughly at will, and to hear Alison and Janet sing together with their full, soft, well-trained voices, was a thing for even a critic less indulgent than the Canon to enjoy.

But presently Alison grew tired. A little thing fatigued her even now, and Leonard, who had called unmercifully for one song after another, seeing that her voice was really failing her, forbore to urge her further.

"But it is only fair that you should take your turn now," said Alison; "you and Mrs. Clyde could sing these songs quite well together. It is not at all necessary to have both treble voices for them. Do—will you?"

And Leonard could not well refuse. Besides, he was not unwilling, if the truth were known, to try his voice with Janet's.

"Here is this little Scotch song," said he. "'Oh, wert thou in the cauld blast!' Let us have it. It is one of the most beautiful of them all. Only let us sing it correctly. There is one word which has been altered from the original—to suit English ears, I suppose."

"I know," said Janet. "It is the line—'Thy bield should be my bosom.' They have changed

it to shield. The Scotch word is by far the best. Such a warm, safe, protecting word it is."

Leonard smiled—a curious, meaning smile, which Janet, as he stood behind her, did not see. And then they sang together that old Scotch song, so tender and true in its wealth and pride of love. And as they sang, his deep sonorous bass blended with his companion's rich contralto voice, as words and music mingle in the song.

When it was over the Canon asked for it again, and after the *encore* Alison proffered a request.

"I have found such a favourite of mine," she said; and she put an old song on the desk. "'When the bloom is on the rye.' It is a very old one, but do sing it, will you? I like it so much. You can play the accompaniment, Janet, I am sure. It is very simple."

Janet shook her head. "I have never seen it before."

"Never mind; try it, just to please me. Come, 'My pretty Jane, my pretty Jane,'" laughed Alison, as she repeated gaily a line from the song, while Janet was glancing over the music.

"It is quite easy," said Mr. Holdych; and,

seeing that it was, Janet began to play the little prelude. But this time, as Leonard sang, she heard more than the music in his voice. She heard something, as the rich, deep tones trembled round her, which told her that through the words of the old ballad he was speaking to her—to her alone. It was but a feeling in the song—evanescent, indefinable—just the bloom upon the music, like the soft, faint tint upon the ripening corn. But there it was, a hazy nothing, yet she felt it passing through her like a troubled thrill, ruffling the still, clear surface of her consciousness. Awhile ago, when she was walking with Alison in the garden, she had been in such a quiet, tranquil mood, within and around her everything so calm, so joyous even, as if nothing could ever again have leave to mar the perfect peace that was brooding over her. And now she found herself shaken all at once out of this still serenity. She did not understand herself. She felt perplexed, disturbed, yet she played on as in a dream. The notes came out distinct and full beneath her skilful touch. They sustained the swelling cadences of the singer's voice; they rippled gaily among the lighter tones; they fell softly into silence, as the tune, entangled

among the closing chords, died in faint and fainter echoes away. She might have accompanied the song a hundred times before, so familiar did the melody of the last verse appear.

And still, through all, she heard that undertone of something beyond the singing, that strange nearness of the singer's voice, which told so surely of the thoughts that lay deep down below.

She sat quiet when it was over, not looking up, not speaking any word of pleasure, just longing to be away somewhere that she might look steadily at this new strange feeling which was quivering within. It had come upon her so suddenly, she could not command herself sufficiently to consider what it was, only she felt dimly that some new influence was surrounding her, that another life had touched her own and left the thrill behind.

Leonard, too, stood silent by her side. Now that the song was over, he knew what he had done. He had meant to have kept his secret for awhile safe in his own breast, before he parted with it to the woman whom he loved. But like a subtle ether, it had wormed its way through the iron-bound reserve which closed so tightly over the hopes and feelings of his inner life. He had

said no word to her. For one moment only, as he stooped to turn a leaf, their eyes had met, but in that glance he had done what could never be undone. They would never be again to each other just as they had been before that song was sung. They must come nearer, nearer, until the life of each was lost in the knowledge of the other's love, or they must draw further and further apart till the last slight cord of mutual interest was snapped.

It must be one or the other. Leonard's was a proud and passionate, as well as a tender and deep-hearted nature. He must have entirely or not at all. He would not brook to be offered friendship where he had asked for love. The Rubicon was passed that parted between the safe land of silence and the untried region of endeavour. Now for the brave heart and the sure hand to win the prize.

He hardly heard Alison, who was thanking him for the song.

"It was always a favourite of mine," she said, "but I never liked it so well before. I am very glad you sing, Mr. Holdych. We are at such a loss sometimes for a good bass voice in our little

Marton gatherings. Ah! here is one I used to know—Schubert's 'Wanderer.' Will it be quite too much to ask you for this as well?"

"Alison will find many favourites, I am afraid," said the Canon, from his easy-chair, "if you humour her in all her requests."

Leonard took the song.

"It is almost too dreary to sing after the other one. It would be like passing out of June sunshine into an autumn fog."

"Never mind," pleaded Alison, "if we feel very much depressed after hearing it you shall sing 'The bloom is on the rye' again to restore our spirits. It is so long since I have heard the 'Wanderer,' and I want to refresh my memory. Mrs. Clyde will play the accompaniment, I am sure. You know it, Janet, do you not?"

And Alison opened the piece and set it on the music-desk before her, as though she had made up her mind to be gratified.

Janet struck the first chords mechanically, and Leonard, not caring to refuse, took up his part when she came to it. But it was, as he had said, a dreary song. There was a moan of homelessness in it that fell heavily upon the ear, after the

rush of glad life in the other. Janet shivered; even Alison was half sorry she had asked to have it.

"You were right," she said; "I should not have made you sing it. It has brought quite a fog into the room. I feel it myself. What must we do to disperse it? I am afraid I do not deserve now to have the other one again."

But even Alison Birney would not have persuaded Mr. Holdych to sing that old ballad again that night.

"If Mrs. Clyde has no objections," he said, "we will have that little song of Burns' once more."

"Ah! that is good of you," said Alison, looking out the book from among the heap that lay upon the Canterbury. "Here it is; I will play it for you, Janet, if you like. I know you like best to sing standing."

Janet rose and gave Alison her place at the piano, placing herself where she could easily see the music as it lay upon the desk. She did not wish to refuse to sing, yet inwardly she was uneasy lest she should not be able to command her voice sufficiently just now to go steadily

through the song. But when she began, her voice came clear and firm. It obeyed her as perfectly as ever when she and Alison had been singing by themselves, until they reached the line that was to be changed, and then looking up she knew not why, as she sang the beautiful Scotch word, she met Leonard's glance again resting on her face. She turned quickly aside. Her heart gave a leap, and then for an instant seemed to cease to beat. Her voice half failed her; for a note or two she trembled on, then with a swift effort recalled herself, and went on without disaster to the end.

She could not help herself. All her quietness was gone. That look of Leonard's, falling on her had been like a lamp brought suddenly into a darkened room, showing her in her own heart what she had been unconscious of before. She felt it an unspeakable relief, when, just as she had finished, the Canon's carriage was announced. It had been ordered early on Alison's account, and her father bade her not delay.

Janet had watched him through the evening as his eye had followed his daughter about the room, lighting up again and again at sight of the smile that played like frequent sunlight on her face, or

at the sound of the rippling, silvery laugh mingling with her sweet, clear accents as she gaily joined in the conversation that was going on. But he was jealous of her still, and feared lest even in her enjoyment she might feel fatigue, and at his look Alison rose at once and began to take her leave.

"Must you go so soon?" said Mrs. Leslie to her.

"Yes, indeed," she answered with her gentle smile, as she pressed the old lady's hand. "These are quite late hours for me."

And in her graceful, pleasant way, she slipped out of the room, and by the time that the little stir of departure had subsided, old Graham arrived with Mr. Brande's pony-chaise. Not a very elegant equipage, certainly, contrasted with the Canon's well-appointed carriage. The old chaise, the old pony, and the old unliveried servant, seemed hardly in keeping with the stately Tudor mansion in front of which they stood. More than once Janet had felt a twinge of mortification as she stepped into it, but just now other thoughts had possession of her mind. She was longing only for the silence and solitude of the drive

home, that she might look this new strange feeling fairly in the face, and at last read her own consciousness aright. She could not do it while surrounded by others. Their presence had disturbed her as a wind ruffles the surface of a lake, making the reflections on it all broken and confused.

But now she was alone with her thoughts. Her father sat in the phaeton at the front, and Graham by his side to drive, for Mr. Brande never cared to do this unless he were alone. As Janet mounted to her seat behind, Mr. Holdych stood by to help her up. Then he fastened the carriage-rug around her and reached his hand to say good-bye. It lingered a moment—just a moment—around her own, with a close, soft pressure that seemed like an echo of that speaking look. Then he drew back, and bowing to Mr. Brande, looked after them as the old chaise drove slowly off.

Janet saw him standing bareheaded at the door until they got into the shadow of the cedar avenue. A moment after, they had passed through the Lodge gates and were bowling smoothly down the village.

It lay all quiet now, the cottage doors closed, the windows darkened, except just here and there where a twinkling light was peeping forth into the night. No farm-yard clatter round John Mason's steading, no clack of ducks waddling round the edge of the pond in the midst of the green. The church tower stood up, a tall grey shadow, with its ivied hood, above the brown gables of the Rectory. But even the old white owl that lodged in the nooks and crannies of the belfry had hushed the loud *To-whoo* wherewith he was accustomed to startle the echoes of the night. All around her was the sleeping earth; above, the silent, starry sky. Arcturus with his lidless eye gazing steadfastly upon her, and streaming across the zenith, the hazy lustre of the Milky Way, with its countless myriads of distant worlds all looking down now as they had done millions of years ago—as they would do when ages yet to come had rolled away, and left, of Marton and its inhabitants, no trace behind.

Janet looked, as they drove along, at the dark hedgerows, the quiet fields, the still tree-tops, all steeped in shadow and repose; and then

up towards the star-strewn heavens, and felt their peaceful influence steal into her soul. Her restless mood fell all away. Her dim, entangled thoughts drew themselves into harmony and order. Folded thus in the bosom of Infinitude, how could she feel otherwise than calm?

And all this time, through the evening hush she heard, like a perpetual refrain, the words of that old ballad ringing in her ears, and the tones of Leonard's voice as he stood beside her singing them. They sounded above the rattle of the wheels along the stony road; they rang on still, those words that at any other time would have been forgotten as soon as heard. But to-night they had spoken to her with a voice to which she could not choose but listen, and far away in the depth of her heart she heard the low, soft answer breathing forth. She looked into the face of the angel that had troubled the waters of her soul, and she knew that it was Love.

END OF VOL. II.

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